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CONTENTS

Ancient Origins Magazine | Issue 8 | April 2019

FEATURES

08 How Samson Killed 1000 Men
With the Jawbone of Taurus

24 Floating Islands: Can They be
Real?

38 Real-Life Lord of the Flies:
The Strange and Violent
History of Pitcairn Island

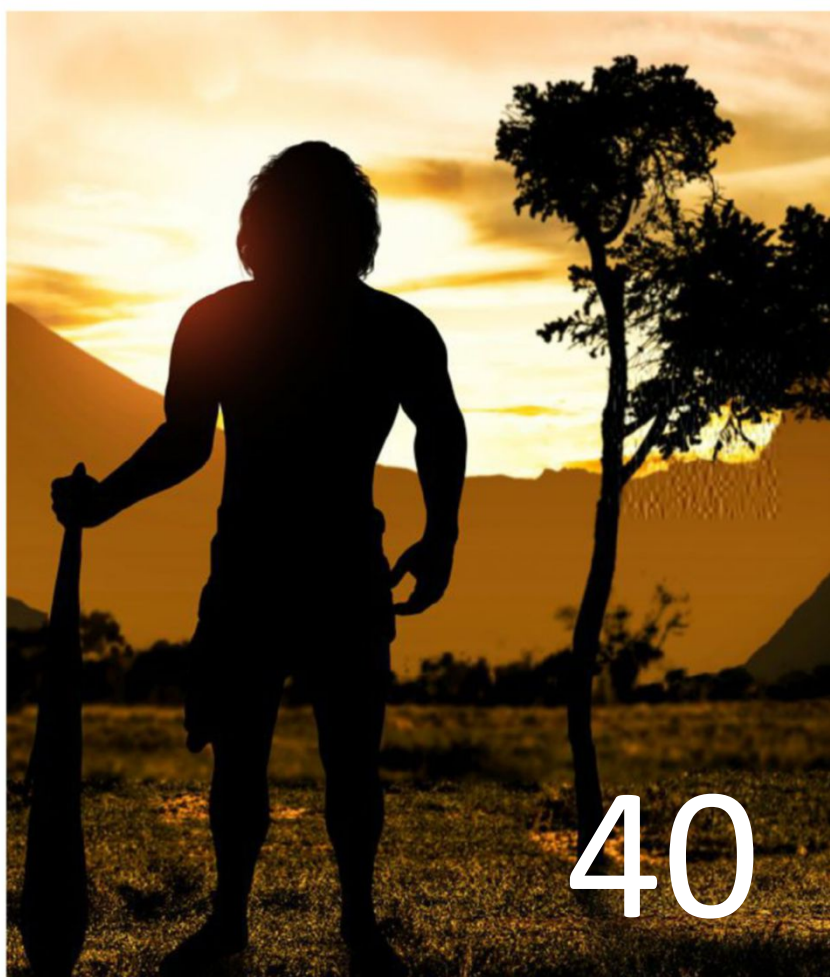
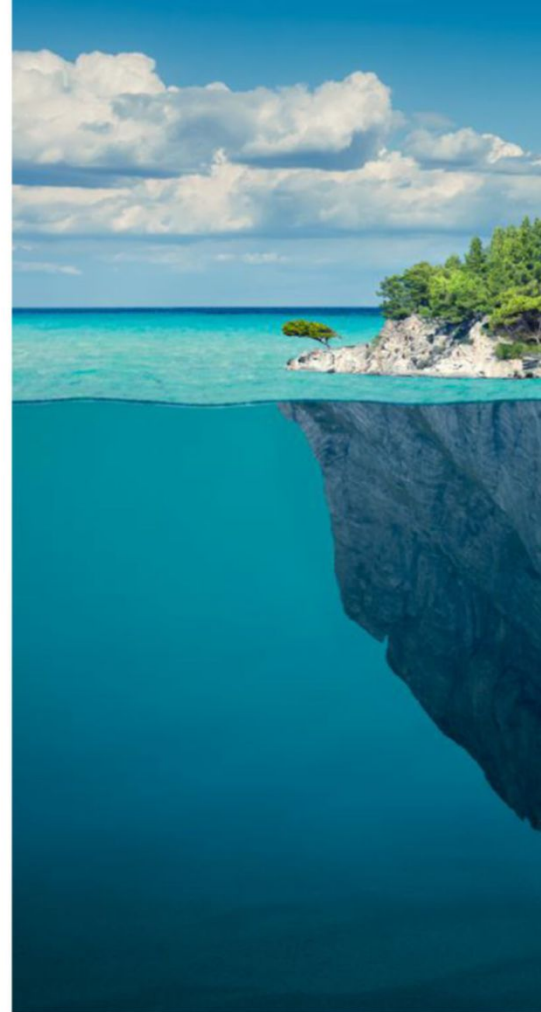
40 The Hobbits of Flores Island

46 The Remarkable Ancient
Navigation System of the
Marshall Islands

50 Was Easter Island a
5000-Year-Old Satellite of the
Indus Valley Civilization?

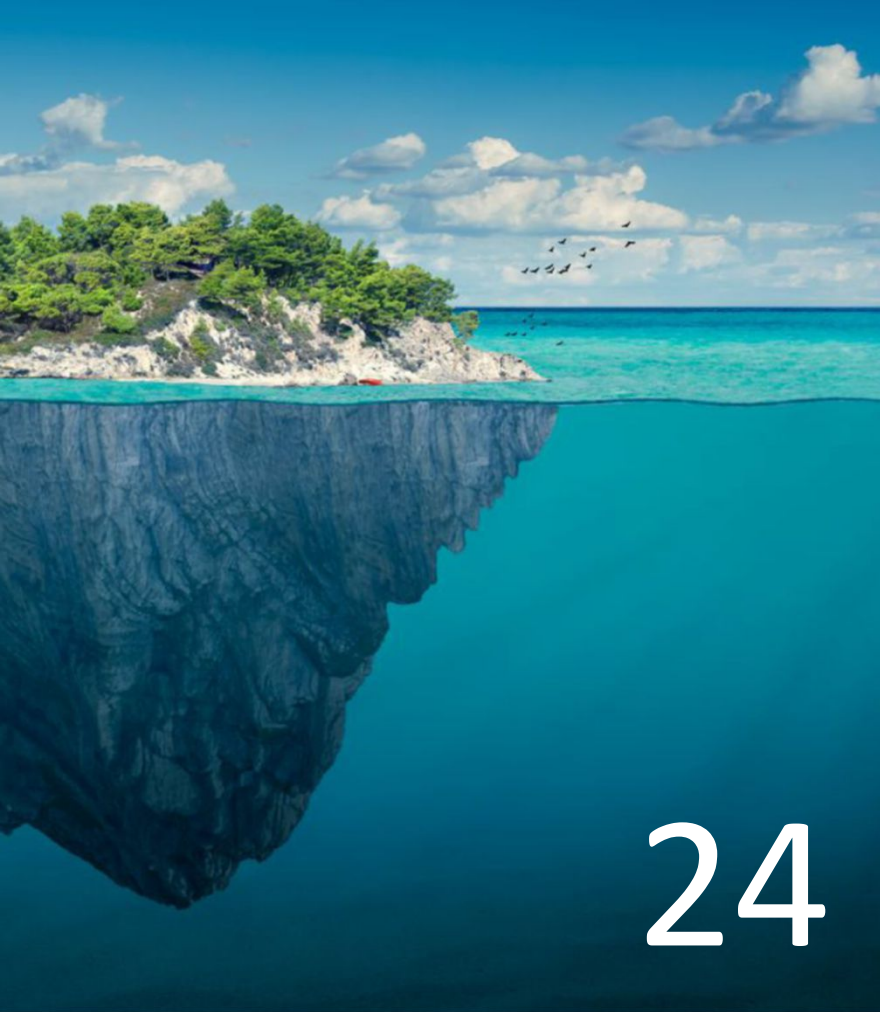
64 Medieval Mont Saint-Michel:
Sacred Castle in the Sea

70 The Ancient Origins of Easter
Traditions



40





| REGULARS

- 04 Editor's Note
- 06 ArchaeoNews
- 18 Ritual Year: All Fools Day – Is the Joke On Us?
- 19 Artifact World: The Ancient Royal Game of Ur
- 80 History Explorer: The Eternal Realms of the Great Pyramid of Egypt
- 82 Academy of Taste: Eat Like a Viking!



CHIEF EDITOR

Joanna Gillan

ART DIRECTOR

Liz Leafloor

AUTHOR COORDINATOR

Micki Pistorius

EDITOR

Alicia McDermott

ADVERTISING

Ioannis Syrigos

CONTRIBUTORS

David Hatcher Childress
Charles Christian
Andrew Collins
Chet Van Duzer
Bryan Hill
John McHugh, M.A.
Mark Miller
Wu Mingren

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Tel. +353 879689709
info@stellanovus.com

Spotlight: Islands

SOME of us are self-confessed island lovers, hooked on the idyllic vision of island living, while others fear the dark truths that may lie beneath the deceiving quaintness of island settings. But whatever our feeling, human beings, and even our ancient hominin ancestors, have been obsessed by islands and their mysterious, haunting charm since our time began.

Hundreds of thousands of islands populate our world and countless more remain in the realm of legend and folklore. Most of the world's islands are well-explored, their secrets plundered long ago, but a few remain mysterious, like those that appear to drift aimlessly across our oceans – is there any truth behind the floating islands of ancient legend? Historian of cartography Chet Van Duzer takes you on a journey to find the answer, from the mythical paradise islands of Chinese philosophical texts to the floating islands of Homer's *Odyssey*.

In this issue, we dive into the puzzles of island life: mind-blowing seafaring abilities and ancient navigation. Like any sea tale worth its salt, we encounter the bizarre and downright dangerous behavior of a pack of mutineers stranded on a remote island in the Pacific. And then there is the world-famous Easter Island that is yet to give up its secrets. Author and

History Channel celebrity David Hatcher Childress raises the unanswered questions, such as how the islanders crafted and moved the gigantic moai statues that dot the island, or why a small, remote population invented their own complex written language that is yet to be deciphered!



Finally, we examine one of the biggest enigmas in paleoanthropology: the mysterious hobbit species of Flores island; a tiny, 3-foot-tall human ancestor whose remains are found nowhere else in the world but an island of Indonesia—and experts still can't agree on where they came from, why they were so small, and what led to their final demise just 50,000 years ago.

Along this journey we make some surprising discoveries; the first being that the food that fueled the Vikings – gruel – can actually be pretty tasty as well as filling. We

also examine a different perspective of Easter; a resurrection and rebirth celebration with pagan roots that has adapted and transformed over the ages. Finally, we explore the Old Testament story of Samson's "Jawbone Massacre", which archaeologist John McHugh reveals is full of hidden messages and Mesopotamian occult divination. ■

Joanna Gillan

Chief Editor, Ancient Origins Magazine

EXPERTS IN THIS ISSUE...



David Hatcher Childress

David Hatcher Childress is a captivating speaker and the author or coauthor of over 20 books. He has traveled the world seeking adventure and answers to the mysteries of mankind's past. His interests are historical, archaeological or cryptozoological.



John McHugh, M.A

John McHugh is an archaeologist who specializes in Near Eastern and Native American Archaeology and holds a special talent for reading ancient languages including Sumerian, Akkadian, Ugaritic, Biblical Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Qur'anic Arabic.



Chet Van Duzer

Chet Van Duzer is a historian of cartography who has published extensively on historical geography and cartography and the works that cartographers use as sources, including geographical texts, travel narratives and illustrated books.

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how much it would become
a part of my life!”



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TEXT BY JOANNA GILLAN

Mummified Mice

Archaeologists unwittingly following the trail of an ancient Egyptian Pied Piper uncovered dozens of mummified mice among a stash of around 50 animals laid to rest in a well-preserved and finely painted tomb.

The tomb was discovered about 240 miles south of Cairo near the Egyptian town of Sohag, in a desert region near the Nile River and archaeologists believe it was built for a man named 'Tutu' and his wife. The tomb dates to an era defined as the early Ptolemaic period, which ended with the Roman conquest in 30 BC.

Although the tomb had been victim to smugglers in the past, the walls of the tomb had been left untouched and display stunning painted depictions of funeral processions and Tutu working in fields and giving gifts before different gods, with his family genealogy recorded in hieroglyphics.

The tomb contained the mummified corpses of a woman aged between 35 and 50 and a boy of about 12 years old. However, most unusually, the researchers also discovered a range of mummified animals including dozens of mummified mice, a smaller number of mummified cats, and one falcon.

The mummified falcon might correspond with either Horus the god of the sun and sky or with Montu, a falcon-god of war in ancient Egyptian religion, while the cats may have been mummified to honor Bastet, a fierce lioness warrior goddess of the sun. Although there was no god or goddess associated with mice, at one time in ancient Egyptian history, rats and field mice were considered sacred.



Egyptian ostracon showing a cat waiting on a mouse
ca. 1295-1070 BC | Brooklyn Museum/CC BY SA 2.5



Sacred Egyptian animal mummy in the form of a falcon. Circa 400 BC-100 AD.

Ancient Tattoo Tool

A PhD student of anthropology has identified the earliest known Native American tattoo tool, dated at 2000 years old – one thousand years older than the previously found artifact linked to tattooing in the region.

Andrew Gillreath-Brown was cataloging artifacts that were recovered from an archaeological site in the south of Utah in 1972, which had never been properly examined, when he discovered a 3 ½-inch tool consisting of two parallel cactus spines bound at the end with split yucca leaves and with a skunkbush handle. A chemical analysis of the pigment on the tips of the cactus spines found a residue of carbon which is often used in ancient tattooing ink.

The tattooing instrument's efficiency has been tested by reconstructing the tool based on the original materials and using it to tattoo pieces of pig skin.

There have been relatively few artifacts for body painting found in North America. This is despite the fact that written records and rock art indicate that body art was once very common. The study of permanent body painting has been hampered because there are no preserved mummies in the American West, unlike in other parts of the globe.

The instrument has been linked to the Basket-maker II culture that flourished in New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona between 1000 BC to approximately 100 AD. This was a nomadic culture that gradually adopted the cultivation of maize and over time became sedentary. They were expert basket weavers and lived in pit-houses or caves.

Neolithic Cannibalism

Archaeologists in Spain found the remains of seven Stone Age people (four adults and three children) who had been butchered and possibly cannibalized in a cave known locally as Cueva de El Toro. Preliminary dating concluded that the bones are up to 8,000 years old.

The team, led by Jonathan Santana of Durham University and his colleagues at the Universidad de Cantabria and the Universidad de La Laguna, also found cups made out of the victims' skulls. A great deal of skill, not to mention a sturdy stomach, would have been needed to make the cups as it involved skinning the head, extracting brain matter, removing facial bones, and cutting off the top of the cranium, which had to have its edges smoothed. This is not the first time that these macabre cups have been found in Spain. They have also been unearthed in caves in the South and North of the country.

The team of experts who found the skull cups believe that the butchered remains are evidence of 'funerary cannibalism', which was common in Neolithic times. It involves consuming the body of the departed so that they can stay part of the clan or tribe or ensure that they have a happy afterlife.

It appears that the butchering and the manufacture of the skull cups occurred in a domestic setting. Research on the remains indicates that at least two people were related. This is possibly evidence that a clan or family group cannibalized its dead members for ceremonial or religious purposes.■





Samson Slays a Thousand Men. James Tissot, 1902

HOW SAMSON KILLED 1000 MEN WITH THE JAWBONE OF TAURUS

TEXT BY JOHN MCHUGH, M. A.

SAMSON'S slaying of a 1,000 men with a donkey's jawbone endures as one of the Bible's most memorable scenes, yet also one of its most enigmatic. Reported in *The Book of Judges* 15:15-19, the vignette recollects how our strongman had been bound by his own countrymen and handed over to the Philistines as a prisoner. After breaking free of his bindings, Samson inexplicably finds the "fresh jawbone of a donkey" within arm's length, which he uses as a makeshift mace to bludgeon 1,000 Philistine men—their bodies somehow falling neatly into "dual heaps". Samson names the site of the execution *Ramath Lehi*, "Jawbone's Height". The prodigious massacre has left our hero mortally dehydrated, and he begs the Judeo-Christian deity for water. *Yahweh* responds by opening up a spring at the site of *Lehi* ("Jawbone"). After drinking his fill, Samson's strength is revived and he subsequently names the place *En Hakkore*, "Caller's Spring", because it was there that he had "called out" to God. The story's bizarre weapon and implausible storyline spark incredulity among rational thinkers. Yet the *Book of Judges* author reported each outlandish detail as an unadulterated fact. Why?

A crucial clue lay with the time and place that the *Book of Judges* was written. *Judges* is part of the *Deuteronomistic History*, a collection of Old Testament Books that were recorded by Jewish exiles in Babylonia during the Babylonian Exile (597-538 BC). While subjugated to the Babylonians, Jewish scholars were conscripted into the royal court of Babylon's kings and indoctrinated with all manner of Mesopotamian occult divination including astrology. And it is the precepts of the Babylonian astrologer that—when used as a cipher—allow us to trace Samson's "Jawbone Massacre" to a multifaceted still-frame in the constellation of Taurus.

JEWISH EXILES ACQUIRE BABYLONIAN ASTROLOGICAL WISDOM

Old Testament passages recount the forced relocation Jewish citizens had experienced after the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar II, had conquered Judah and sent many of its inhabitants to his territories in southern Mesopotamia. *Ezra* 2:64 declares that 42,360 Jews were exiled to Babylonia. And in *2 Kings* 20:18, the prophet Isaiah laments the fate that many Jewish captives faced, stating that they would "become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon".

The specific function that some Jewish exiles performed for the Babylonian king is documented in the *Book of Daniel*. In Chapter 1, Daniel and three of his compatriots were forcibly enlisted into the entourage of Nebuchadnezzar II, where they experienced total immersion into the esoteric arts of the Mesopotamian *ummānu*, a "scholar" or "magician" whose skill set included celestial divination. In verse 5:11, the Babylonian queen confirms that Daniel had risen through the scholarly ranks to become the supervisor of all Babylonian magicians, including the astrologers. Hence, during the Babylonian Exile, multiple erudite Jews had become indoctrinated with Mesopotamian astrological arcana. And the *Book of Judges'* author may have been one of them.

THE STARRY SKY DEPICTS "HEAVENLY WRITING"

While sitting in colloquies with Babylonian astrologers, Jewish neophytes were familiarized with that land's premier astrological tenet: that the celestial sky depicted sacred *shitir shamê* or "Heavenly Writing". In Babylonian astrological thought, the celestial sky was conceptualized as a divine cuneiform tablet that had been inscribed by the star-gods themselves.



WHILE SUBJUGATED TO THE BABYLONIANS, JEWISH SCHOLARS WERE CONSCRIPTED INTO THE ROYAL COURT OF BABYLON'S KINGS AND INDOCTRINATED WITH ALL MANNER OF MESOPOTAMIAN OCCULT DIVINATION, INCLUDING ASTROLOGY



Painting of Babylon captivity. Gebhard Fugel 1863-1939.

This accords perfectly with the title of the Mesopotamian astrologer, *tupsharru*, “writer, scribe”, a label which also implies the ability to read. It was the astrologer’s job to “read” the “Heavenly Writing” for divine communiqués that had been imparted by the astral-deities themselves.

A magician’s commentary reveals the manner by which revelations were divulged: “Hidden words [are] the secrets of the gods”. By “hidden words” (*amāt nitsirti*), the ancient sorcerer was referring to what we today would call *polysemy* (i.e., multiple meanings in a word or phrase), *word-play*, or *puns*. And although considered a form of witticism by modern standards, in the ancient Mesopotamian world, punning was construed as a medium through which revelation could be imparted from the gods to humanity.

Thus, Babylonian astrologers were adept at reading the “Heavenly Writing” for wordplays that could impart inviolable truth about the nature of the universe and the events that had taken place in it. If the *Book of Judges* author’s experience in Babylon resembled that of Daniel and his fellow Hebrews, then he too had been taught to perceive the celestial sky as divine “Heavenly Writing” that imparted inviolable truth through wordplay embedded in the Babylonian star-gods’ images and titles. Indeed, we’ll soon see that puns encrypted in cuneiform terms for Taurus allow the irrational details in Samson’s “Jawbone Massacre” to crystallize into a series of astral wordplays embedded in the titles for the zodiacal Bull.

To recognize such puns, it is first necessary to understand how polysemy manifests in cuneiform writing. When Jewish scholars were conscripted into the astrological schools of Babylonia, they learned that the Babylonians wrote their Akkadian language in the 600-sign, syllabic cuneiform script. They also learned that the Babylonians didn’t invent cuneiform writing, but merely

adopted this script from the Sumerian people who devised it around 3000 BC. The Akkadian-speaking Babylonians incorporated aspects of the Sumerian language into their writing system in the form of Sumerian logograms. In essence, a Sumerian logogram is a Sumerian word that stood for an Akkadian word of equivalent meaning (sort of the way the Latin abbreviation *lb* denotes “pound” in English). Readers should note that Sumerian logograms are typically transliterated as capitals, while Akkadian words are transcribed as italics.

Babylonian-trained Jewish astrologers soon learned that a cuneiform logogram often had multiple meanings. For instance, the Sumerian word for “star”, MUL, represented the Akkadian *kakkabu*, “star”; yet is also represented in other words including *shitru* (“writing”). MUL was also read MULU, a rare logogram for *amīlu*, “man”.

Jewish astrologer-scholars also learned that cuneiform writing was replete with *Homophones* (e.g., to, two, too). So many, in fact, that linguists were forced to devise a transliteration scheme that allowed them to distinguish which cuneiform sign appeared on a tablet. This is exemplified in the figure that lists five Sumerian logograms that could be read “MUL”. The sign most frequently read, MUL, is transcribed without a subscript numeral; the second most common reading of “MUL” is transliterated MUL2; the third most frequent reading of “MUL” is transcribed MUL3, and so forth. Noteworthy is that each of the “MUL” signs bore alternate readings and represented additional Akkadian words. MUL2, for example, was also read TE, which represented the Akkadian noun *ushshu* (“foundation”) and the verb *sahālu* (“pierce”). Hence, when a Babylonian astrologer wrote or read one of the “MUL” logograms, it could potentially convey “star, writing, man, foundation, pierce, wasp, watercourse, fruit, feeling-related” and “field” through polysemy.



Essential to remember is that the subscript numbers are a modern scholarly convention; ancient Babylonian astrologers read each of these cuneiform signs as “MUL”.

The diagram of five logograms exemplifies how polysemy imparted revelation to astrologers that could decipher the cryptic messages in the “Heavenly Writing”. And it is highly likely that the *Book of Judges*’ author was privy to this wisdom.



FINDING “SAMSON” AND A “DONKEY’S JAWBONE” IN TAURUS

The author of the *Book of Judges* knew that Samson’s vowel-less Hebrew name, *Sh-m-sh-w-n*, was comprised of the base word *Shmsh* (“Sun”), and *-wn*, the diminutive suffix akin to *-ette* in English. Hence, *Shmshwn* means “Little-Sun”, in the same way that kitchenette means “small kitchen”.

While pursuing cuneiform star atlases and lexical commentaries for sacred puns, he would have encountered a stunning synchronism. One of the supreme deities of the Babylonian pantheon was the sky-god, *Anu*. And his *Agû* (“Crown”), was embodied in the conspicuous Hyades asterism (a pattern of stars) in Taurus.

Moreover, ancient Sumerian-Akkadian lexicons confirm that multiple Sumerian logograms represented *Agû* (“Crown”), one being *MEN5*. And these same lexicons also list *MEN5* as the logogram for the Babylonian deified *Shamash* (“Sun”), as well as *sharru* (“king”), a word that also rendered “baby, infant, young child”.

Hence, when the writer of the *Book of Judges* perused Mesopotamian lexical and astronomical tablets, he would have noticed that polysemy in the spellings for Taurus’ “Crown” asterism yielded “Infant-Sun, Baby-Sun”—the cuneiform equivalent to Samson’s Hebrew diminutive connotation, *Shmshwn* (“Small-Sun”).

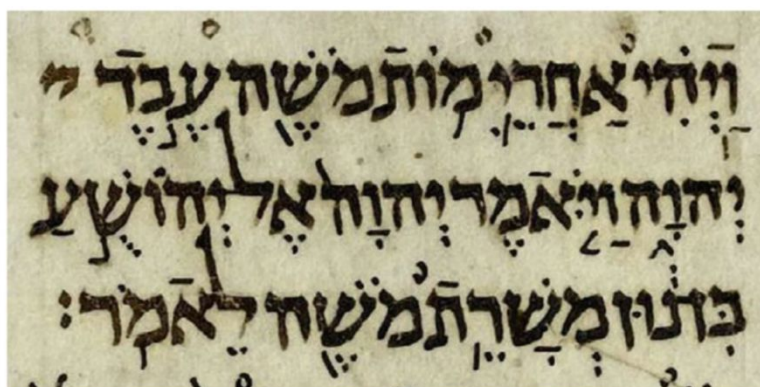
In an era when concealed puns in the celestial “Heavenly Writing” dictated revelation to astrologers skillful enough to decipher their secrets, the *Book of Judges’* author would have learned that Taurus embodied the renowned Hebrew warrior, “Small-Sun”/Samson.

Yet cuneiform astronomical tablets accessible to the *Book of Judges’* author also imparted another startling fact: “... the Jawbone-of-the-Bull [is] the Crown of the Sky-god”. Here, the author learned that the Hyades asterism simultaneously represented the “Jawbone” (*Isu*) of Taurus the Bull. And here lies the simplest explanation for Samson’s absurd weapon. *The Book of Judges’* author would have known that one of the common logograms for Taurus, *PIRIG* (“Bull”), was also read *GIR3*, and functioned as the logogram for the Akkadian noun *imēru* (“donkey”). Hence, through

Sumerian Logogram	Akkadian	Meaning
 MUL	<i>kakkabu</i>	“star”
 MULU	<i>shitru</i> <i>amīlu</i>	“writing” “man”
 MUL ₂ TE	<i>kakkabu</i> <i>ushshu</i> <i>sahālu</i>	“star” “foundation” “to pierce”
 MUL ₃ SUR ₃	<i>kuzāzu</i> <i>haru, sūru</i>	“wood wasp” “watercourse”
 MUL ₄ UL	<i>kakkabu</i> <i>inbu</i> <i>habātsu</i>	“star” “fruit” “to feel elated”
 MUL ₅ IKU	<i>kakkabu</i> <i>ikū</i>	“star” “field”

Above: Five different logograms that could be read “MUL”, some alternate readings, along with some of the Akkadian words they represented. Courtesy author.

Below: Inscriptions from the Hebrew Bible, and Cuneiform tablet.



polysemy, the author surely comprehended that the “Jawbone-of-the-Bull” was concurrently the “Jawbone-of-the-Donkey”.

The conception of the Hyades as a “Donkey’s Jawbone” may have been reinforced through an additional pun. Sumerian-Akkadian lexical tablets list the Sumerian IS-SI as the equivalent to the Akkadian *isu* (“jawbone”). However, the cuneiform sign IS could also be construed as is in Akkadian, the possessive-case form of the word “jawbone” which literally renders: “jawbone-of-the”. Moreover, ancient cuneiform lexicons list SI as a logogram for the Akkadian *imēru* (“donkey”). The *Book of Judges*’ author would have therefore realized that the Sumerian IS-SI (“Jawbone”) could also be construed as *Is-SI*: “Jawbone-of-the”– “Donkey”.

In sum, wordplay encoded in the names for the Hyades divulged the presence of Samson (“Little-Sun”) and the “Jawbone-of-an-Ass”.

The *Judges 15:15* assertion that the Donkey’s Jawbone was “fresh” bears a correlation in one of the rarer spellings for “Jawbone”, *Ishu*; which forges a *Homonym* with *ishu*, “fresh”.

Verse 15 declares that Samson “grabbed” (*yiqāhehā*) the jawbone. Its correlate is found in *Lû* (“Bull”), a common Akkadian spelling for Taurus. *Lû* was pronounced exactly like the logogram LU. And at the time the *Book of Judges* was written, the LU and DIB signs were inscribed identically.

Because LU was inscribed precisely like DIB (“grab”), it also connoted “grab”. An astute grammarian like the *Book of Judges*’ author would have comprehended that one of the terms for Taurus, *Lû*, was phonetically imbued with the logogram LU/DIB (“grab”); which is precisely what Samson does with the jawbone. Finally, Taurus’ bright “Eye”-star, Aldebaran, could be written with the logogram IGI (“eye”). And ancient cuneiform lexicons also list IGI as a logogram for “he”.

All told, we find the words “He, Grabs, the Fresh, Jawbone-of-the, Donkey” encrypted as puns in the cuneiform titles for Taurus; which correspond directly to Samson’s behavior in *Judges 15:15*.

In verses 15-16 Samson “killed” his enemies, using forms of the Hebrew verb *nākāh*, “to smite, kill”. The cuneiform correlate is found in the logogram for “Jawbone”, SI, which could also be read SIG9, thereby phonating the Sumerian logograms SIG3 and SIG7: “to kill”.

According to the literal rendering of *Judges 15:15-16*, Samson killed “a 1,000 man” (*‘eleph iysh*). Correlates to these words can be found in the zodiacal Bull’s bright “Eye”-star, Aldebaran. The logogram for “Eye”, IGI, concomitantly served as the logogram “1,000”. And the Akkadian term for Taurus, *Lû* (“Bull”) is pronounced exactly like the logogram LU2, “man”. Altogether these puns yield: “Samson, Kills, 1,000, Man”; which mirrors the Hebrew words in *Judges*.

“DUAL HEAPS” AND “JAWBONE’S HEIGHT”

Verse 16 makes the dubious claim that the 1,000 slain warriors fell tidily into “a heap, dual heaps” (*ḥamor ḥamorāthāim*). Once again, the “logic” of this assertion is readily traced to punning in Taurus. The Pleiades asterism embodied the course “Bristle” of hair on the nape of the Bull’s neck and was often spelled MUL4-MUL4 in astrological tablets. However, MUL4 can also be read DU7. Because the *Judges* author was inculcated with Mesopotamian astrological arcana, he would have known that MUL4-MUL4 could also be read “DU7-DU7”. And DU7 phonates DU6, “heap”. Thus, phonetically encrypted in the Pleiades cuneiform title was the reading “DU6-DU6”, or “Heap, Heap”—which corresponds with the Hebrew terminology of *Judges 15:16*.

In verse 17 Samson “named” (*yiqrā*) the site of the carnage *Ramath Lehi*, “Height-of-the-Jawbone”. The Sumerian word for “Jawbone”, IS-SI, formed a *Homonym* with the Akkadian *issi*, “he-named”. And cuneiform star atlases unequivocally list Taurus as a DINGIR (“god”), a logogram that also represented the Akkadian words *sha* (“of”) and *ashru* (“place”).



Moreover, because the *Book of Judges* author was an astute linguist, he knew that GUD was the sign-name for Taurus' most frequent logogram, in the same way that English speakers have named the letters A, B, C, "Ehy, Bee, See". GUD ("Bull") formed *Homophones* with GUD5 and GUD8, logograms that represented the Babylonian noun *mēlû* ("height"). Hence, "He-Named, the Place, Height, Of, the Jawbone" was encoded in polysemous readings of the cuneiform signs of Taurus; which is precisely what is stated in *Judges 15:17*.

CONCLUSION

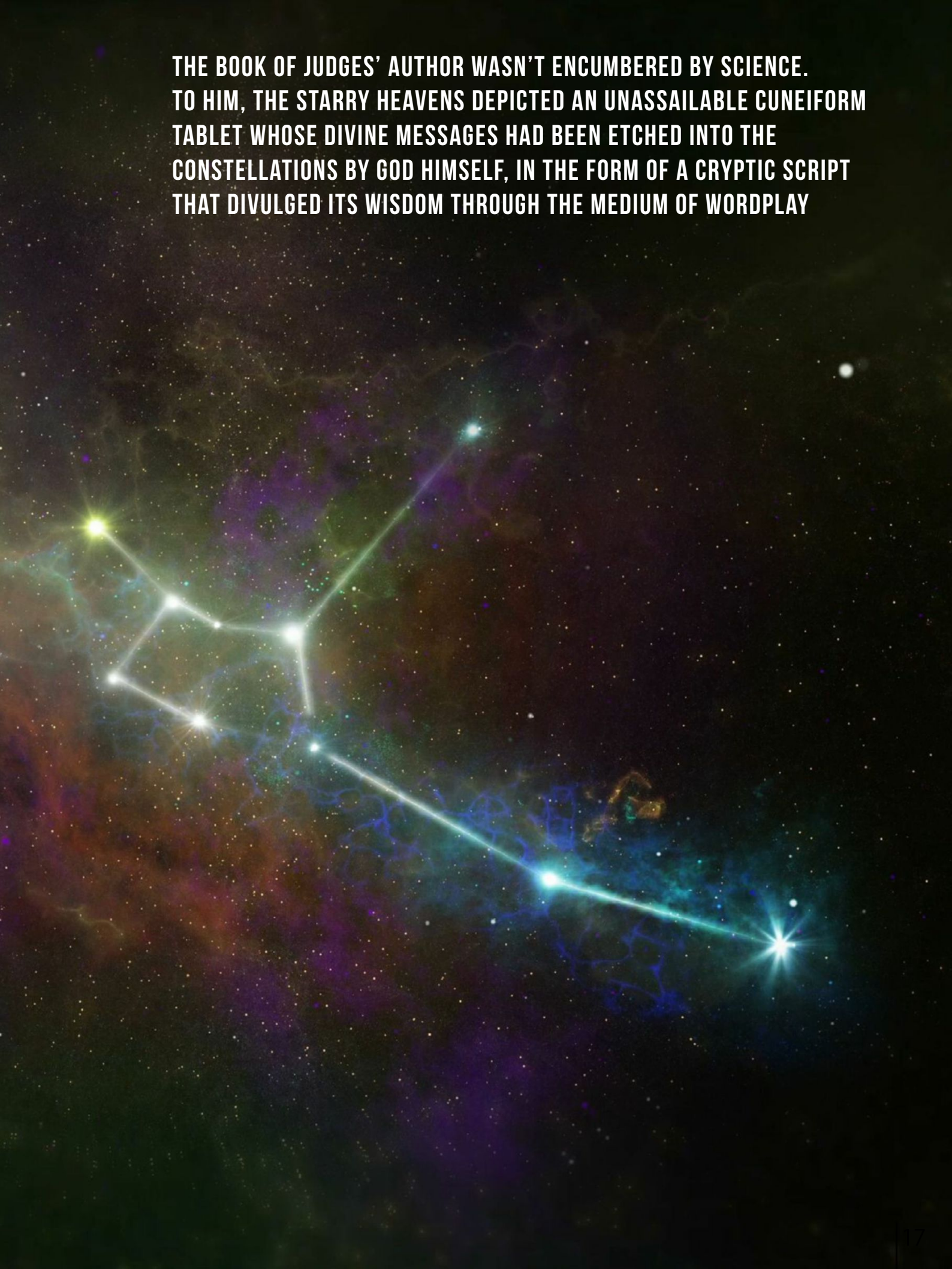
Today, science-oriented thinkers scoff at the preposterous claims made in *Judges 15:15-19*, emphasizing that such supernaturalism falls well beyond the confines of natural law. Ironically, the *Book of Judges*' author wasn't encumbered by science. To him, the starry heavens depicted an unassailable cuneiform tablet whose divine messages had been etched into the constellations by God himself, in the form of a cryptic script that divulged its wisdom through the medium of word-play. The aforementioned astronomical puns in Taurus disclosed a remarkably illogical scenario. However, because the bizarre props and dubious details were encrypted in the hallowed "Heavenly Writing" of the stars, the *Book of Judges* author construed them as a revelation which described a divine combat scene that had taken place on earth. He then arranged the celestial cuneiform puns into coherent Hebrew and recorded them as a factual history as the "Jawbone Massacre" narrative recorded in the *Book of Judges*.■

This article is an abridged version of "How Samson Killed a Thousand Men with the Jawbone of Taurus: The Mesopotamian Astrological 'Science' Behind Judges 15" published in *The European Journal of Science and Theology*, December 2018, Vol.14 No.6, pp. 17-40.



Artistic rendering of Taurus, a constellation of the zodiac. It is one of the oldest constellations, dating back to at least the Early Bronze Age.

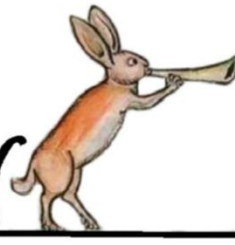
THE BOOK OF JUDGES' AUTHOR WASN'T ENCUMBERED BY SCIENCE. TO HIM, THE STARRY HEAVENS DEPICTED AN UNASSAILABLE CUNEIFORM TABLET WHOSE DIVINE MESSAGES HAD BEEN ETCHED INTO THE CONSTELLATIONS BY GOD HIMSELF, IN THE FORM OF A CRYPTIC SCRIPT THAT DIVULGED ITS WISDOM THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF WORDPLAY





Charles Christian's

Ritual Year



All Fools Day –
Is the Joke On Us?

THIS year in the month of April, of course, we have the celebrations of Easter and Holy Week – but you don't want to know about Easter, do you? Of course not – you already know all about that (although chocolate Easter eggs are always welcome at my house) but what about April 1, otherwise known as April Fools' Day?

Now, this is a weird tradition because nobody seems to know how or why or even where it first arose. In England, even the notorious 17th-century gossip Samuel Pepys makes no mention of it. Its first mention in English sources is in John Aubrey's writings, circa 1686 AD, and in 1698 AD we hear of several people being fooled into turning up at the Tower of London "to see the lions washed". The Tower, it should be noted, also served as a zoo in this era.

Furthermore, unlike many traditions, which are only prevalent in the English-speaking world (April Fools pranks are still very big in the United States today) this does have an international appeal. So what are its origins?

It's a nice idea but we can dismiss the theory April 1 was the day the Ancient Romans tricked the neighboring Sabine tribe into bringing their women to town (where they were then abducted *en masse* by the Romans who had disproportionately far more men than women – see accounts of 'The Rape of the Sabine Women') because of calendrical differences. In fact, during this era, the Romans listed April as the second month of the year!

However, a more positive suggestion is that it stems from a calendar change in France, during the 16th century,

when the country adopted the Gregorian calendar (that is the one we still follow today) and moved New Year's Day from April 1 to January 1. But old traditions die hard, and in many rural parts of France, people still celebrated New Years in April, when they were derided by their more sophisticated compatriots for being 'April Fools'.

For reasons now opaque (besides which I was a total duffer when it came to studying French at school), in France, All Fools Day is better known as '*Poisson d'Avril*', when French children take great pleasure in taping paper fish to their friends' backs. Nevertheless, from France, the practice of trying to make fools of people on April 1 spread across Europe, including the Nordic countries, and eventually reached North America. There is even a variation – called the 'April First Lie' – in Lebanon.

Some indication of the historical nature of April Fools tradition can be gleaned from the fact that in Poland (where it is better known as '*Prima Aprilis*'), in the year 1683 AD, an important military alliance against the Ottoman Empire that was signed on April 1 was actually backdated to March 31 so that there would be no misunderstandings about the veracity and seriousness of the treaty.

The Poles, incidentally, share the custom of English-speaking countries that all trickery must cease at 12 noon otherwise the joke rebounds on the prankster. As the old verse runs...

***April First has gone and past
You're the biggest fool at last.■***



Charles Christian is a barrister and Reuters correspondent turned writer, award-winning tech journalist, radio presenter, podcaster, blogger, storyteller, and sometime werewolf-hunter who presents a weekly podcast: the [Weird Tales Radio Show](#).

The Ancient Royal Game of Ur

BY WU MINGREN



THE Royal Game of Ur, also known as the Game of Twenty Squares, is a board game from ancient Mesopotamia. Dating back 4,600 years, this two-player game is one of the oldest known board games in the world. Over 100 examples of the game have been found, though the best-known examples are from the Royal Cemetery of Ur, from which the game derived its name.

The game boards were made of various materials. The most iconic one is a simple board of wood with the top surface containing 20 variously inlaid square shell plaques. The squares are divided into three areas – an area of three by four squares, an area of three by two squares, and a bridge of one by two squares connecting the two areas. The back of the board is decorated with three lines of triangular shell ornamental inlays. The edges of the board are made of small plaques and strips, some sculpted with an eye, while others possibly with rosettes. This board is currently on display in the British Museum.

A cuneiform tablet written by a Babylonian scribe in 177 BC contained some useful information regarding the game. Each player had five different pawns and a special throw was required for their placement at the beginning of the game. Five of the squares on the board contain rosettes and these squares were considered to be lucky. Pawns that landed on such squares received an advantage. Unfortunately, the tablet does not provide information about the path that the pawns ought to take on the board, and to date, this puzzle has never been solved.

While people today perceive board games mainly as a form of entertainment, it may have been different for the players of the Royal Game of Ur. It has been suggested that the players also used the board game to predict their future, and that the events in the game were thought to contain messages from the gods or other supernatural beings.■



Living Lights

The Waitomo Glowworm Cave is a magnificent subterranean cave system in Waitomo, New Zealand, which as its name suggests, is renowned for its glowworm population. The glowworms, sometimes referred to as fireflies, belong to a species unique to New Zealand and are not found anywhere else in the world.

The glowworms are able to glow in the dark thanks to bioluminescence, which is made possible by the reaction between the chemicals released by the glowworms and the oxygen in the air. As a result of the light emitted by these tiny creatures, the ceiling of the cave looks as though it is lit by countless stars. Thousands of visitors flock to the Waitomo Glowworm Cave every year to witness this beautiful spectacle with their own eyes.

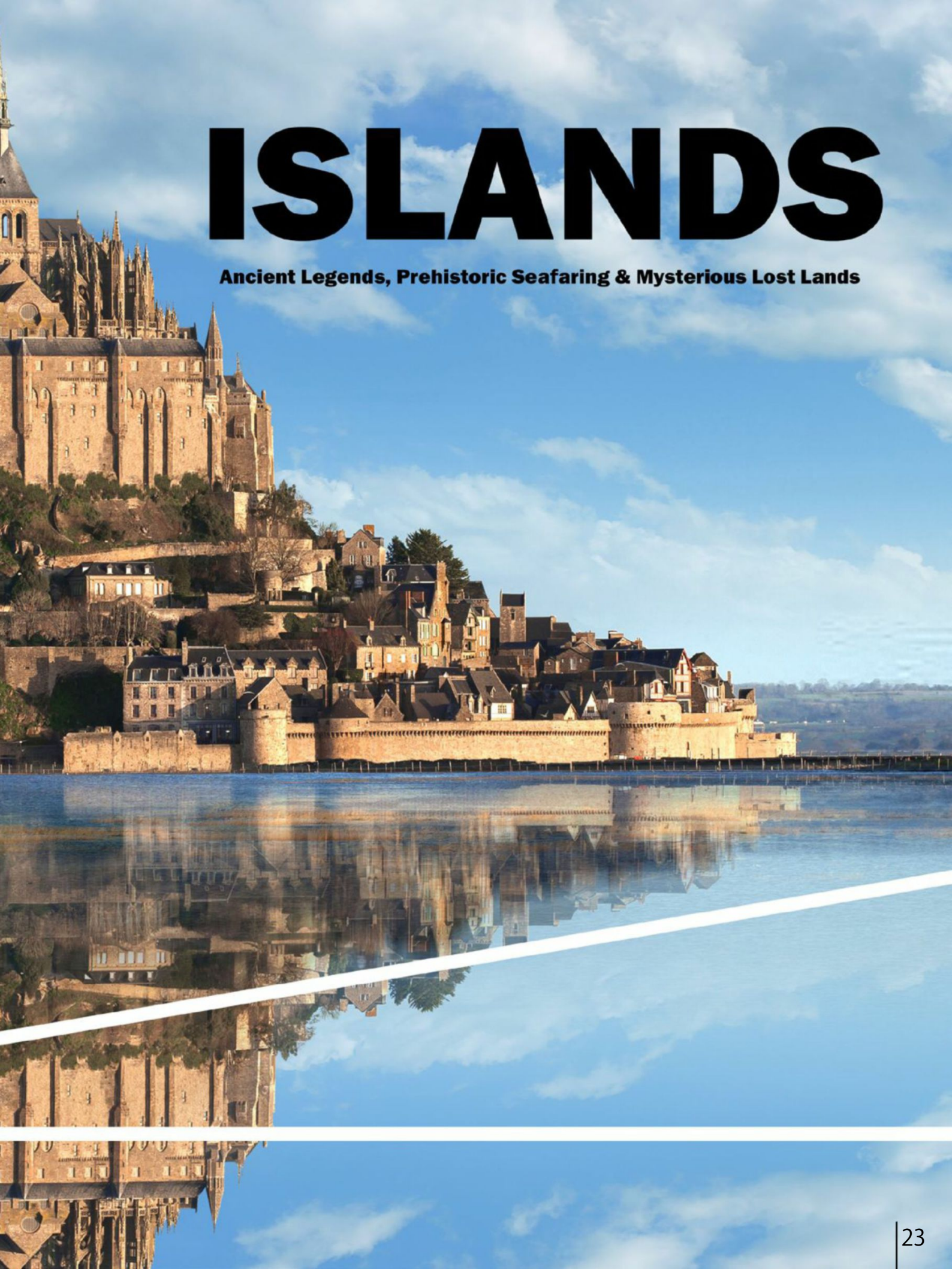
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Spotlight



ISLANDS

Ancient Legends, Prehistoric Seafaring & Mysterious Lost Lands



Floating Islands

Can They be Real?

BY CHET VAN DUZER



A floating island - can such a thing exist? Can the chunks of the solid earth on which we stand drift easily about the surface of a body of water? The idea of a floating island seems impossible, something from the realm of fantasy, an invention of poets or mythographers. The topic provides an interesting case study of a situation in which an apparently mythical object has a corresponding reality, but the great differences between floating islands in myth and floating islands in reality clearly indicate the great transformative power of the human imagination.

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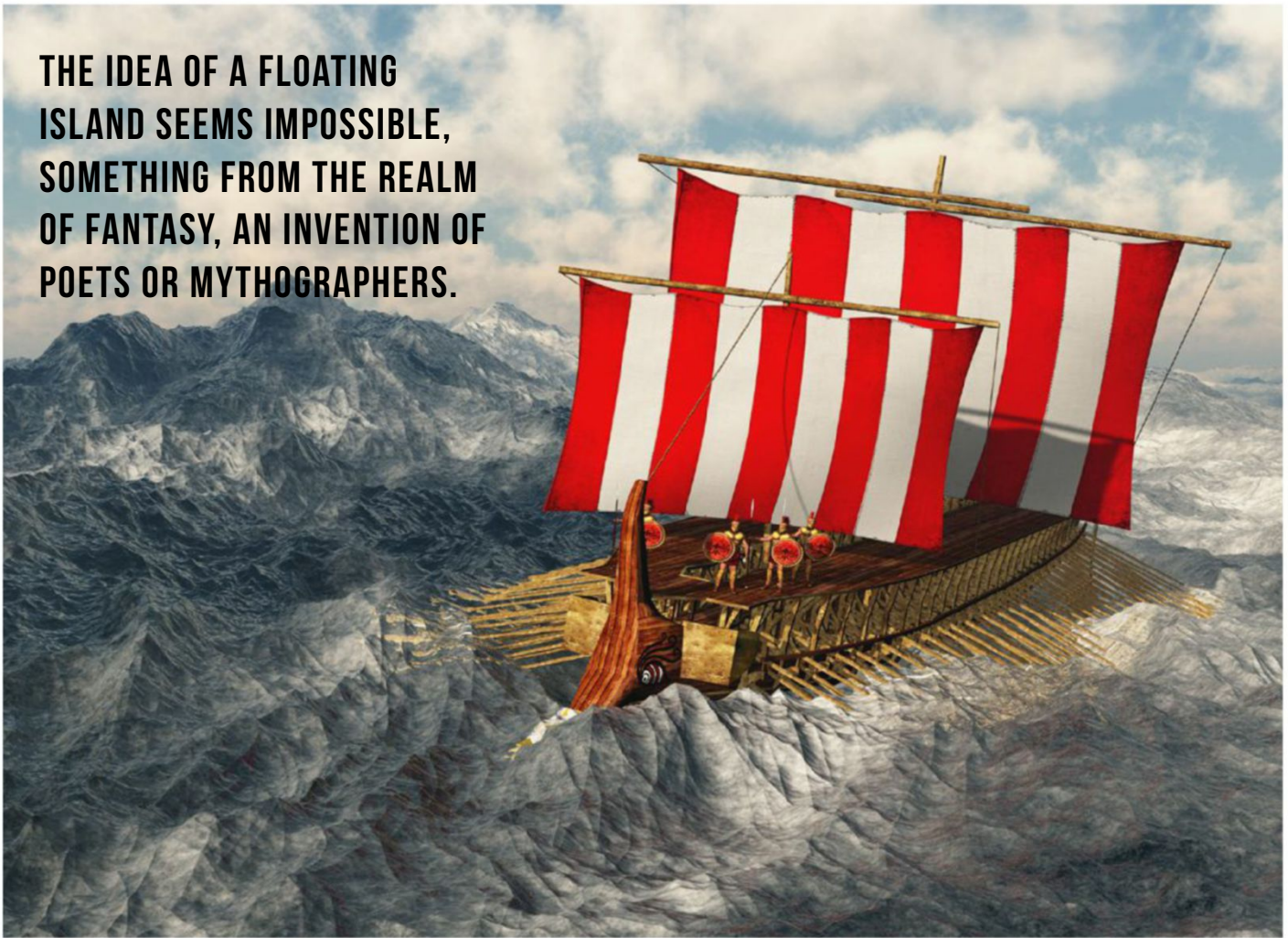


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THE IDEA OF A FLOATING ISLAND SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE, SOMETHING FROM THE REALM OF FANTASY, AN INVENTION OF POETS OR MYTHOGRAPHERS.



The first floating island that appears in western literature is that of Aeolus, the god of the winds, in Homer's *Odyssey*:

"Next we came to the Aeolian island, where dwelt Aeolus the son of Hippotas, beloved by the immortal gods, on a floating island, the whole enclosed by a wall of unbreakable bronze, and a sheer cliff running up to it."

Aeolus, whom Zeus had made keeper of the winds, entertained Odysseus for a month, and then gave him a magical device that should have ensured his passage back home to Ithaca: a leather bag into which he put all of the winds except the West Wind, which carried Odysseus' ships on their way home. After 10 days' sail Odysseus came within sight of Ithaca, but then he fell asleep, and his men, thinking that the bag Aeolus gave Odysseus must contain presents of gold and silver, opened it, releasing the winds, which drove the ships back to Aeolus' floating island. Odysseus asked Aeolus to help him again, but Aeolus sent him away harshly, after telling him that it would not be right for him to help one who was clearly hated by the gods. In this case, the island's mobility seems to imply an advantage enjoyed by Aeolus: since he controls



the winds, he can have them move his island wherever he pleases. Or perhaps the mobility is intended to reflect the changeability of the winds themselves.

An ancient commentator on Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* records the curious belief that all islands were once floating islands, thus painting an engaging picture of the early history of the earth, with all of the islands moving about freely.

The myth that the island of Delos once floated is well known: the island was only fixed in place after Leto gave birth to Apollo and Artemis there. Perhaps the most evocative account of this myth is in the *Anthologia Latina*:

"Delos, now held in place by solid earth, once floated on the purple sea and as the wind urged moved lightly here and there, tossed about by the waves.

Then the god bound her with twin chains, with one to Gyrarus, and with the other fixed her to firm Mykonos."

No explanation of the island's mobility is supplied, but the fixing of the island in place functions as a permanent memorial of a very important addition to the Greek pantheon.



蓬萊仙境
丁酉秋月
畫

According to the Chinese philosopher Lieh-Tzu, who lived in the fourth century BC, the five Chinese mythical paradise islands, which are named Tai-yu, Yuan-chiao, Fang-hu, Ying-chu, and P'eng-lai, all originally floated. Here the idea of mobility is invoked to account for the difficulty of locating the islands.

The mythical floating island of P'eng-lai. Yuan Yao, 18th century.

The most famous mythical floating island of the Middle Ages is certainly that encountered by St. Brendan of Ardfert and Clonfert (484 -577 AD) during his alleged Atlantic wanderings in search of the *Terra Repromissionis*, or Paradise. According to the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, the oldest extant manuscript which dates to the 10th or 11th century, St. Brendan and his men come upon an island. St. Brendan urged his men to land on the island and they did so, finding it to be rocky, with no sandy shore and just a few trees but no other plants. The monks spent the night in prayer on the island while St. Brendan remained in the boat. In the morning, St. Brendan ordered his men to sing mass and they did so, and then they brought meat and fish from the boat to the island and started a fire and put a pot to boil on it. But when the water in the pot was about to boil, the island began to move, and the monks ran to the boat, leaving behind everything they had brought ashore, and they begged St. Brendan for protection. St. Brendan took them aboard and told them that God had revealed to him that the island was, in fact, the largest fish in the ocean, which always wished to join its tail to its head but could not because of its great length; the name of the fish is Jasconius (from the Irish *iasc*, "fish").

St. Brendan's islands were believed to be real and thus are mentioned by Honorius Augustodunensis in his *De imagine mundi* (12th century), by Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, and by Domenico Silvestri in his *De insulis et earum proprietatibus* s.v. "Perdita" (late 14th or early 15th century). The islands also appeared on several maps. The Ebstorf *mappamundi* (circa 1300) places an *Insula perdita* found by St. Brendan, but never thereafter seen by any other man, in the approximate location of the Canary Islands, that is the Fortunate Islands of the ancients. Similarly, the Hereford *mappamundi* (circa 1300) has an island in the location of the Canaries which bears the legend *Fortunatae insulae sex sunt Insulae Sct Brandani*. The

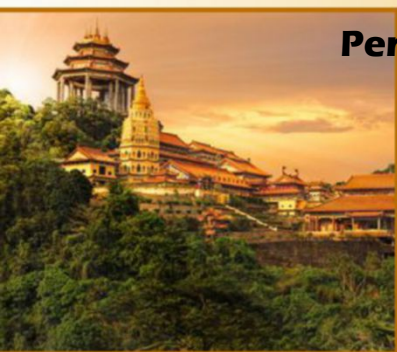
islands also appear on the Angelino Dulcert nautical chart of 1339, the Pizzigani chart of 1367, two charts by Guillem Soler (1380 and 1385), and on two charts by Battista Beccario (1426 and 1435), and also on a chart of the same period attributed to Beccario in the collection of Sidney R. Knafel.





The Voyage of St. Brendan, 1908.

Don't Miss These 5 Historical Islands



Penang, Malaysia

Since 1786, George Town blends East and West: Malay, Chinese, Indian, British, German, and other influences are visible in the old homes, historic shops, churches, temples, and government buildings.



Zanzibar, Tanzania

Stone Town has an Arabic Sultan's Palace and a Zanzibari and Swahili House of Wonders, the Old Fort, amphitheater, and Turkish baths. Merchant shops and plantations highlight the history of the spice trade.



Gozo, Malta

The island has Neolithic Ggantija temples and Xaghra Stone Circle, the Citadella built by the Knights of Saint John, a WWII shelter, churches, and towers. Roman, Byzantine, Turkish, and British culture blend with prehistory.



Lewis and Harris, Scotland

Home to the ancient Callanish standing stone circle, Celtic Iron Age brochs and hill forts, and the Viking Lewis Chessman. Medieval Christians built the church of St Clements.



Kefalonia, Greece

Visitors see Cyclopean walls, an ancient acropolis, a Mycenaean cemetery and tholos tomb, a Roman cemetery and villa, frescoes, and two Medieval castles.

There has been considerable discussion of the source of the whale-island in St. Brendan's voyage. Some have suggested that it comes from a similar episode set in the Indian Ocean from the fourth century Babylonian *Talmud*, or else the First Voyage of Sinbad in the *Thousand and One Nights*, in which an island is revealed to be a whale when a fire is lit on it, and it quickly sinks beneath the water, carrying many to their deaths. Buzurg b. Sahriyar ar-Ramhurmuzi in his *Livre des Merveilles de l'Inde*, which survives in a 13th-century manuscript and was probably written in the 10th century, and which is thought to have been one of the sources of the Sinbad stories, contains a very similar episode involving a giant turtle which sinks underwater when it feels fire on its back. The episode



of the whale-island also appears in al-Jahiz's *Kitab al-Hayawan* (Book of Animals), written in the ninth century; and al-Qazwini's *Aya'ib al-majluqat wa-gara'ib al-maw'yudat* (Book of the Wonders of Creation), which was written in the 13th century, contains an account of a giant sea-turtle mistaken for an island very similar to that in Buzurg b. Sahriyar ar-Ramhurmuzi.

However, it seems more likely that the source of St. Brendan's whale-island was the *Physiologus*, an anonymous book of animals (but which also describes some stones and trees) written in Greek, probably in Alexandria, in the third century AD. Francis J. Carmody, in his attempt to reconstruct the Greek original of the *Physiologus* by collating the oldest extant manuscripts of the work in various languages, renders the relevant passage from the chapter on the whale thus:

"The Physiologus says of the whale that it lives in the sea and is called the aspidocelon.... the whale has the appearance of an island; and sailors, not knowing this, think that it is an island; they drop anchor and fix stakes and tie the ships, and descend upon it, and light fires on it to cook food; and when the whale grows warm and feels the burning of the fire, it plunges into the depths of the sea, and carries with it ships and all. So you, if you are incredulous, and put your faith in the devil, shall be carried by him to the depths of hell."
(*Physiologus: The Very Ancient Book of Beasts, Plants, and Stones*, trans. Francis J. Carmody. San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1953)

It is clear that the author of the Brendan narrative has turned this material to a very different purpose, for here the whale is a symbol of the devil, and kills many men, while Jasconius is benevolent and does not sink beneath the water when he feels the fire.

In the Brendan and *Physiologus* narratives, fire is what causes the whale-island to move; curiously, there are two other medieval narratives in which fire causes a wayward island to stand still. In the opening of the 13th-century *Guta Saga*, the island of Gotland was originally so bewitched that it sank by day and rose to the surface of the sea only at night, but after Tjelvar brought fire to the island, it never sank again. And in Giraldus Cambrensis's *Topographia hibernica*, doubts are raised about whether a particular island, presumably to the north of Ireland, is a whale or other monster, or really land, as it had disappeared beneath the waves when approached. A young man shot a red-hot arrow into the island and this magically fixed it in place, so that it never again disappeared. These episodes recall the fixing in place of the isle of Delos.

A very interesting floating island appears in some of the Grail romances, specifically *L'estoire del Saint Graal*, *Le Livre d'Artus*, and *Joseph d'Arimathie*. This is "L'île Tournioiant" or "L'île Tournoyante," a mythical island formed of an amalgamation of the four elements following creation, which floated about until it came to a steady position in the western ocean, where it turns in place, in sympathy with the rotation of the heavens. Nascien was once miraculously transported to this island; there he sees a ship built by Solomon, and in that ship, a sword that had belonged to King David. When Nascien draws the sword, it shatters, as he is not worthy to hold it; later the sword was repaired, and eventually, Nascien came to Britain and became a hermit in the service of the Grail.

Among Native Americans and Canadians, a floating island plays a role in Iroquois and Cherokee creation myths, in an 'Oakinacken' (Okanagan) story of origins, and also in a Hareskin flood myth. According to the Okanagan myth, in the beginning, the people lived on an island in the middle of the ocean, and their ruler, a woman named Scomalt, enraged by her people's quarreling, drove them to one end of the island and then broke off the piece on which they stood, and pushed it adrift. Only one couple survived on this floating island, and from them descended all of the Okanagan people. Here the floating island functions as a method to separate primordial good people from bad.



Aspidochelone lures hapless mariners to land on its back, Danish manuscript, 1633.



Aspidochelone upsets mariners, French manuscript, 1270.



Nascien travels in a cloud to the Spinning Island, French manuscript, 1270.



A vibrant tropical island scene. On the left, a tall palm tree stands on a grassy hill with red flowers. Two parrots, one green and one blue, are perched on the palm fronds. A small wooden boat is moored at a simple dock in the water. In the background, a large, dark whale tail is visible, emerging from the water. The sky is filled with dramatic, white clouds.

The buoyancy of the islands in mythical accounts of floating islands always adds an element of wonder, and sometimes, as in the case of the *île tournoiant*, and also perhaps in the case of St. Brendan's island, that seems to be the only function of the island—that is, it adds an element of the marvelous to the story. But these islands can have a wide variety of other functions within their narratives. The island's earlier mobility, contrasted with its current stability, can serve to separate a mythical age of wonders in which islands could move from the historical age, in which islands have fixed locations, as in the cases of Delos and the islands described in the *Guta Saga* and by Giraldus Cambrensis. Or the island's mobility can reflect its chief inhabitant's changeability, as in the case of the island of Aeolus in Homer's *Odyssey*; or the island's inaccessibility, as in the case of the Chinese paradise islands, and also St. Brendan's island to some extent; or a dramatic separation of one people from another, as in the case of the Okanagan story of origins.

ISLANDS IN NUMBERS

141,370,000

The population of Java, the world's most populated island.

822,700

The size in square miles of Greenland, the world's largest island.

221,831

The number of islands in Sweden with an area of at least 270 square feet.

11,000

The number of islands in the world that are inhabited.

375

The size in square miles of the Dutch island of Flevopolder, the world's largest man-made island.

62

The number of people living on Palmerston Island in the Pacific. All but three are descended from English sailor William Marsters.

10

The percentage of the global population that lives on islands.

Floating islands do indeed exist on six of the seven continents; they may have trees growing upon them, be hundreds of feet across, and support the weight of humans living upon them and even of cattle grazing upon them. Floating islands are kept buoyant by the light spongy tissues of certain aquatic plants, by gases released into their soil by decomposing vegetation, or by both of these forces. In very rare cases they have also been seen at sea, so the floating islands in the stories just examined could theoretically have had a basis in fact. But, when one examines accounts of sightings of these islands, the difference between the islands in the mythical and factual accounts is so striking that one is left with the impression that real floating islands seen at sea have no relationship whatsoever with the mythical accounts of such islands.

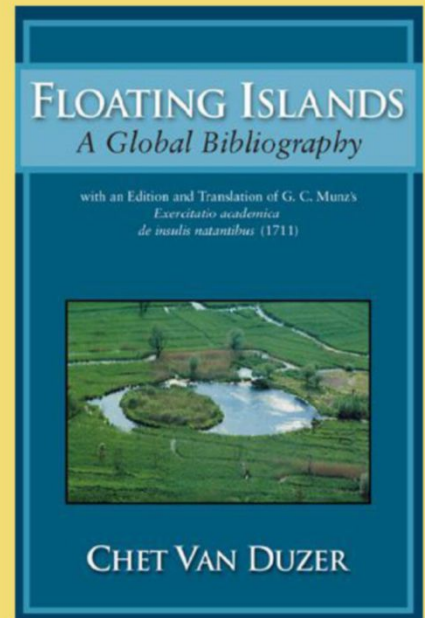
Floating islands are most often found in lakes and wetlands, but they also form during floods of the great tropical rivers of the world when large masses of aquatic vegetation or chunks of their banks are torn away and carried downriver. The Congo in Africa is one such river, and floating islands that came down the Congo were reported 149 miles out to sea from the river's mouth. Floating islands are also common in the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea following the monsoon rains. The islands are called "lik lik aislands" in Pidgin English and can be up to 328 feet across with still-living trees on them. The Río Paraná and Río de la Plata in South America also generate floating islands - when they flood, they are filled with floating islands called *camalotes*, which are matted masses of water hyacinth. A famous episode at Convento de San Francisco in Santa Fe, Argentina, which is located on the Río Paraná, involved the killing of two friars at the Convento by a jaguar that arrived on a *camalote* during a flood of the Paraná on April 18, 1825.

In the flood of 1905, the Río de la Plata at Buenos Aires was covered with *camalotes* as far as the eye could see, some half a mile long and 100 feet wide, others just a few feet in diameter. As they came down the river, these islands hit moored ships and tore the ships from their moorings. And the islands brought passengers with them: many species of tropical snakes, deer, a puma, parrots, and monkeys. An Indian baby was found on a floating island that came ashore near Rosario, and although he was weak from hunger and exposure (the flood occurred in July, which is winter in the southern hemisphere), he was brought back to health. This flood and the floating islands are described in contemporary newspaper articles and also in Guillermo García Moyano's *Pueblo de los Pocitos*.

FLOATING ISLANDS A Global Bibliography

By Chet Van Duzer

FLOATING ISLANDS: A Global Bibliography is a unique treasury of information about one of nature's marvels: floating islands. Its bibliography contains more than 1,500 citations of books and articles in 20 languages on the subject.



FLOATING ISLANDS DO INDEED
EXIST ON SIX OF THE SEVEN
CONTINENTS

Uros floating island in Lake Titicaca.

Floating islands that come down rivers end up at sea; many are quickly destroyed by the waves, while others survive for quite some time, but accounts of floating islands seen at sea are rare.

An article in the November 8, 1908 edition of *The Washington Post* reports that a United States cruiser in the Caribbean north of Honduras encountered an island which they soon discovered was floating. (This is certainly one of the largest floating islands ever seen at sea):

"It proved to be a little island about three-quarters of a mile around and a quarter wide. In shape, it was long and narrow, with a thick growth of vines and bushes reaching down to the water's very edge. Three tall coconut palms grew in the middle of it. No life of any kind was on the island, nor was there any water, though instead of being sandy or rocky as such islands usually are, the soil was rich, dark and very moist. After gathering the coconuts, the sailors returned to the cruiser, which, oddly enough, seemed much further off, and considerably more to the southwest than when they left her. Then it just dawned on them that they had been visiting one of the floating islands so often heard about but seldom seen in the South Atlantic. Further observation confirmed the suspicion, as the cruiser remained near it long enough to see the island change its position."

In 1924, similar floating islands were reported in the Palawan Passage north of Borneo/Kalimantan. *The New York Times*, May 23, 1934, tells of Captain Jonas Pendelbury of the steamship *President Adams* describing about 10 floating islands:

"Captain Pendelbury encountered the biggest of the floating islands first. He said its palm trees were higher than the wireless masts of his ship and in their tips were chattering monkeys and singing birds. Through marine glasses, the skipper said he saw great masses of flowering vegetation and a large number of cobras, deadly reptiles."

These accounts of floating islands seen at sea are remarkable, as they give first-hand descriptions of a very rare, surprising, and seemingly impossible natural phenomenon, namely an island that moves freely about the surface of the sea. Such records are of particular interest to evolutionary biologists, as they lend support to the theory that floating islands have played a role in the dispersal of plant and animal species across the oceans, and thus contributed to the process of evolution. But perhaps surprisingly, they are of little value to the historian of myths or literature who might be interested in studying stories about floating islands. Those stories, which are also filled with wonder, were perhaps vaguely and distantly inspired by reports of real floating islands, but once the storytellers had seized on the idea of the

floating island, they re-elaborated and reshaped it until it became something entirely new, and very distant from its origin in reality. The idea of a floating island, an apparent impossibility, satisfied the teller's interest in marvels, but in incorporating this idea into a tale, the storyteller transformed it into a whale's back, or the birthplace of gods, or the means of separating primordial peoples, or the material left over after the creation. The idea is transformed, in other words, according to Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1849), "by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination." ■



**ACCOUNTS OF FLOATING ISLANDS
SEEN AT SEA ARE REMARKABLE, AS
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SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE NATURAL
PHENOMENON**



Real-Life Lord of the Flies

The Strange and Violent History of Pitcairn Island

BY JOANNA GILLAN



PITCAIRN ISLAND is a place so remote, and with a history so bizarre, that until recently it was viewed almost as myth rather than reality. But the events that took place on this tiny island in the Pacific Ocean were very real.

It is one of four volcanic islands in the southern Pacific Ocean that make up the Pitcairn Group of Islands. Located more than 3,000 miles from any continent, approximately halfway between New Zealand and the Americas, it is one of the remotest inhabited islands in the world.

The history of the Pitcairn Islands stretches back at least nine centuries, when the islands were colonized by Polynesians. Their culture flourished there for four centuries before mysteriously disappearing. Archaeological findings also suggest that different people from various points of origin came to Pitcairn at different times in the past.

When Europeans first landed on Pitcairn and nearby islands in the 17th century, they found many artifacts and traces of former inhabitants, including roughly hewn stone gods guarding sacred sites, representations of animals and humans carved into cliff faces, petroglyphs, burial sites with human remains, earth ovens, stone adzes, gouges, and other relics.

But the island's history would soon take a different path.

Settled by a pack of mutineers of the HMS Bounty in 1790, along with a small group of Polynesians, the island soon became like the famous 1954 novel *Lord of the Flies*, in which a group of boys stuck on an uninhabited island descended into savagery and immorality.

Faced with physical, social, and psychological isolation, along with struggles for power, the population rapidly diminished due to murder, suicide, and madness, and the remaining inhabitants descended into incest, sexual abuse, and delinquency.

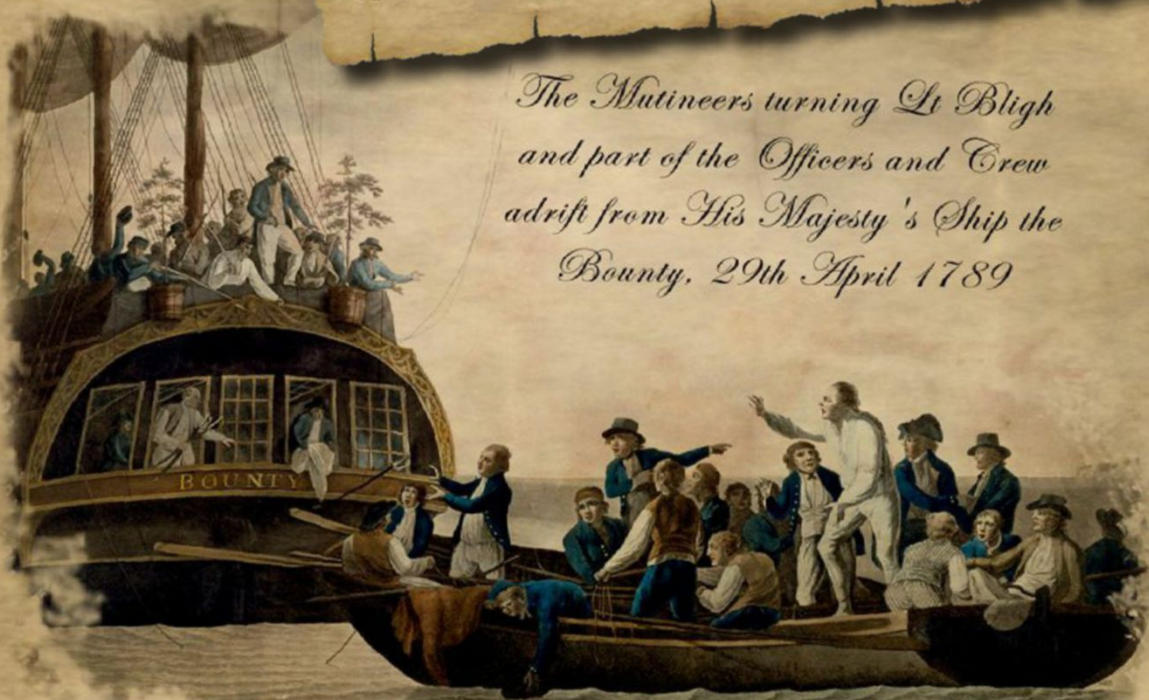
Today, 50 inhabitants from just four families remain on this ill-fated island that carries with it a dark history that has been retold in countless films and books. ■

This page: Polynesian wooden carving of Pitcairn Island region
Opposite: Pitcairn Island Map | Matthias Schlüter/CC BY 3.0/Deriv
Illustration of Fletcher Christian and the mutineers turning Lt Bligh
and crew adrift from HMS Bounty, 29th April 1789

Pitcairn Island



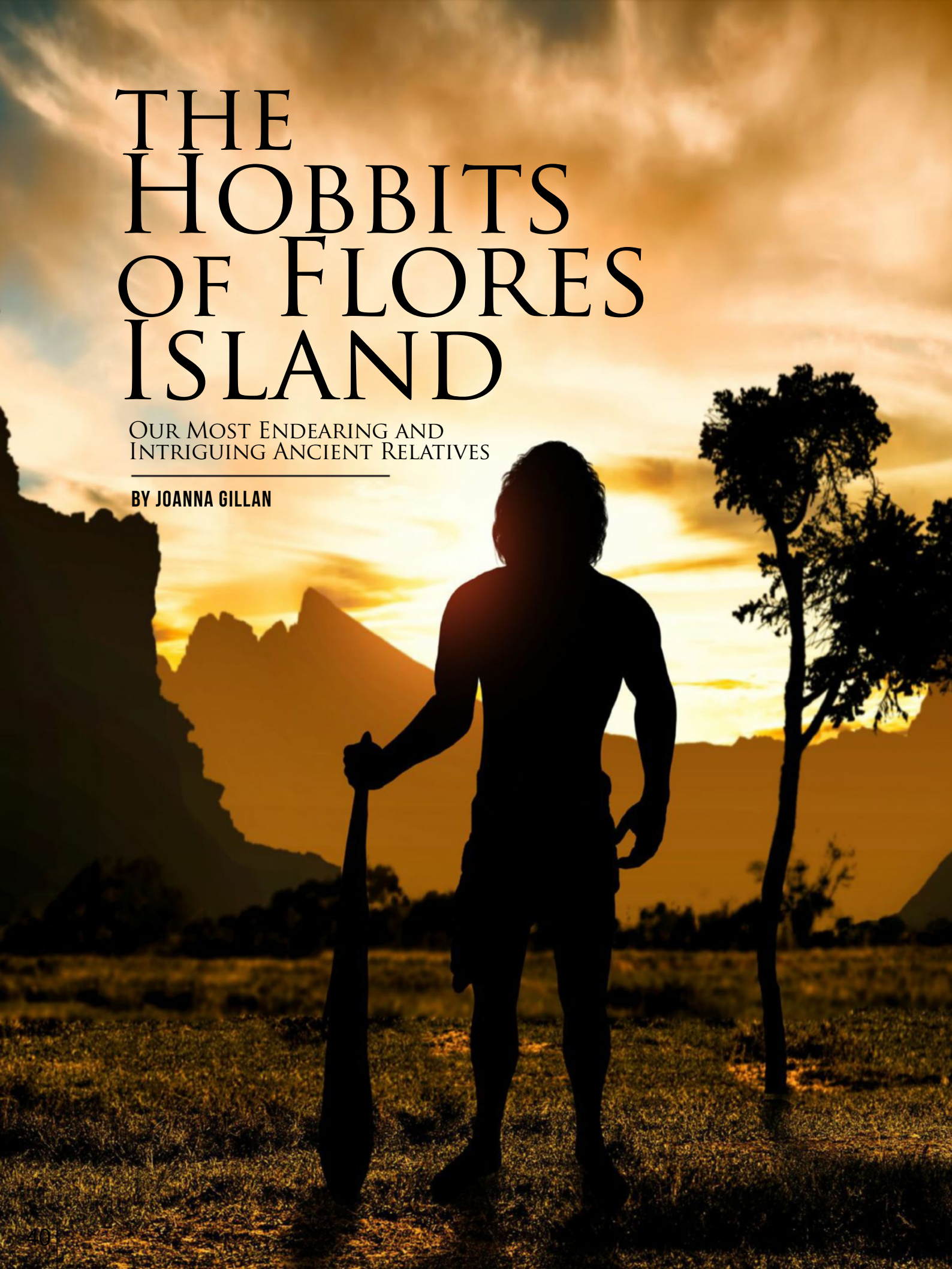
*The Mutineers turning Lt Bligh
and part of the Officers and Crew
adrift from His Majesty's Ship the
Bounty. 29th April 1789*



THE HOBBITS OF FLORES ISLAND

OUR MOST ENDEARING AND
INTRIGUING ANCIENT RELATIVES

BY JOANNA GILLAN



FLORES is a pretty island in eastern Indonesia which is home to nearly two million inhabitants. Its name is taken from the Portuguese 'Capa de Flores', meaning 'Cape of Flowers'. Flores Island draws tourists from all over the world for its smoldering volcanoes, bubbling hot springs, emerald rice terraces, quaint traditional villages, and hidden beaches. It is the third most popular tourist attraction in Indonesia after Bali and Lombok Island.

But there is something far more unique and important to Flores than its picturesque scenery – it is the only place on Earth where traces of an ancient hominin species known as *Homo floresiensis* have been found.

Homo floresiensis was first discovered in 2003, when an excavation in Liang Bua Cave in western Flores yielded fragmentary skeletal remains of a tiny hominid species that is estimated to have had a height of only around 3 feet 6 inches, considerably shorter than the average adult height of even the smallest modern humans. Partial skeletons of nine individuals have been recovered, including one complete skull. The discovery was hailed as the most important find in human evolution for 100 years.

News of the discovery of a tiny archaic human species piqued the imagination and delight of people around the world who compared the species to the Hobbits imagined by J.R.R. Tolkien in *Lord of the Rings*, and since then, *Homo floresiensis* has affectionately become known as the Hobbit species of Flores Island.

The Hobbits occupied the island until relatively recent times, effectively becoming extinct around 50,000 years ago. Despite their tiny brain size, which puts them in the intelligence range of chimpanzees, they did exhibit some advanced

behaviors.

The caves in which their fossils were found showed evidence of the use of fire for cooking, and animal bones found alongside them had cut marks, indicating that they used sharp implements for butchering animals for meat. Stone tools found in the region are thought to be attributed to the Hobbits and may have been used for the hunting of the *Stegodon*, a now extinct species belonging to the family *Elephantidae*. Scientists have hypothesized that *Homo floresiensis* also had language.

NEWS OF THE DISCOVERY OF A TINY ARCHAIC HUMAN SPECIES PIQUED THE IMAGINATION AND DELIGHT OF PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD WHO COMPARED THE SPECIES TO THE HOBBITS IMAGINED BY J.R.R. TOLKIEN IN LORD OF THE RINGS

SEPARATE SPECIES?

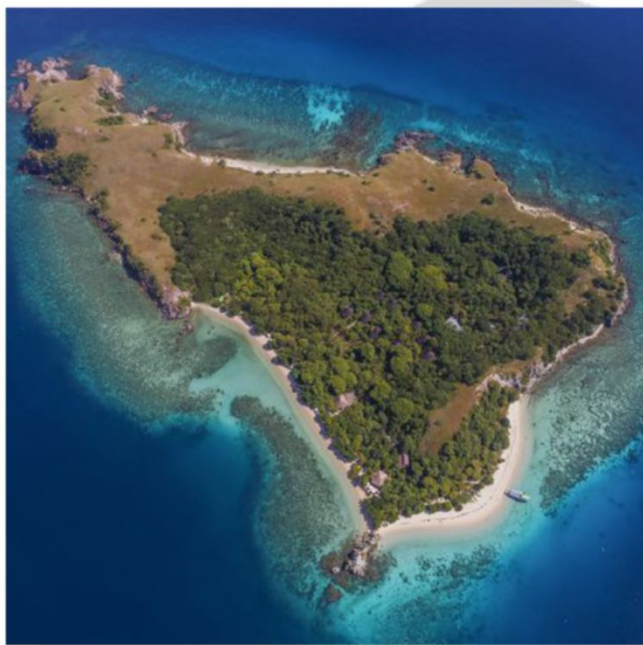
After the discovery of its skeletal remains, *Homo floresiensis* became the subject of much debate and intense research to determine whether

it represented a species distinct from modern humans (*Homo sapiens*), or whether the remains belonged to a modern human with a disorder

such as microcephalia, a condition characterized by a small head, short stature and some intellectual disability; Laron syndrome, a genetic disorder that produces short stature and a small skull; or Endemic cretinism, a form of dwarfism still found in the local Indonesian population.

Numerous studies have now largely discredited the latter theory, pointing to features of the *Homo floresiensis* skull that are not consistent with any of these conditions. For example, the frontal and temporal lobes of the *floresiensis* brain were highly

developed, unlike a microcephalic brain; the cranial vault of the *Homo floresiensis* skull is not consistent with that of an individual with Laron syndrome; and a study in 2009 comparing Flores bones to ten individuals with cretinism found no overlap in anatomical features typical of the disease.



A popular theory today is that the 'Hobbit' was a member of our family tree, belonging to the genus *Homo*, which descended from a population of *Homo erectus* that made its way to Flores around one million years ago and subsequently shrunk in stature due to the "island effect" over a period of about 300,000 years. *Homo erectus* lived between around 1.9 million and 143,000 years ago and is the first known species to have expanded beyond Africa to Asia.

However, renowned paleoanthropologist Chris Stringer from the Natural History Museum in London suggests that the Hobbit species was instead descended from *Australopithecus*, a genus of hominids that evolved in eastern Africa around four million years ago, spread out across the continent, and eventually became extinct around two million years ago.

This theory raises the possibility that the ancestors of *Homo floresiensis* left Africa before the appearance of *Homo erectus* and evolved further in Asia.

A more recent study from 2017 by the Australian National University (ANU) suggests yet another possibility – that *Homo floresiensis* was a sister-species of *Homo habilis*, meaning these two shared a common ancestor. *Homo habilis* is an archaic species of *Homo*, which is believed to have lived around 2.1 to 1.5 million years ago and is an intermediate between *Australopithecus* and *Homo erectus*.

The ANU study, which used 133 data points ranging across the skull, jaws, teeth, arms, legs, and shoulders of *Homo floresiensis*, concluded that there was no evidence for the popular theory that the Hobbit species evolved from the much larger *Homo erectus*, the only other early hominid known to have lived in the region. Instead, statistical modeling pointed to a clear relationship with *Homo habilis*, and its line much more ancient than *Homo erectus*.

In 2014, another discovery offered a piece to this complex puzzle. The remains of a second group of even tinier archaic humans were found on Flores island, dating back around 700,000 years. A lower jaw fragment and six teeth from three separate individuals were found in layers of rock at a site named Mata Menge, about 43 miles away from where the *Homo floresiensis* fossils were found at Liang Bua.



Top: Cave on Flores Island where the specimens were discovered in 2003, Liang Bua, Flores, Indonesia. |

Rosino/CC BY SA 2.0

Mid: *Homo floresiensis* skull
Left: The Woman of Flores. Model representing a *Homo floresiensis* |

Eunostos/CC BY SA 4.0



Archaeological Forensic Facial Reconstruction of the individual LB1 of the species *Homo floresiensis*. | Cicero Moraes/CC BY 4.0



**NOT ONLY DID THEY INTERACT,
BUT HUMANS MAY HAVE BEEN
RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR
EXTINCTION**

The Mata Menge jaw bone and teeth are similar in dimensions and morphological characteristics to those of *Homo floresiensis* from Liang Bua. The exception is the first molar, which retains a more primitive condition.

The teeth found at Mata Menge are smaller than those found at Liang Bua, but experts can't be sure that this size difference is due to distinct differences between entire populations, or simply variations between individuals.

The scientific team involved in the study of Mata Menge fossils, who published their research in the journal *Nature* in 2016, have suggested that the oldest artifacts on Flores, dating to at least one million years ago, were made by "large-bodied ancestors of the Mata Menge hominins" and go on to write:

"This apparently very fast transformation in hominin body size is surprising. Although no other documented examples of rapid island dwarfing exist for primates, we note that red deer from the island of Jersey had reduced to one-sixth of the body size in the ancestral population within about six millennia.

Flores may have been an exceptional case; however, the fossil evidence from Mata Menge highlights how quickly major evolutionary changes could have occurred in hominin populations cut off on isolated and impoverished islands."

It is speculated by scientists that limited resources and an absence of advanced predators made the few megafaunal species that reached the island subject to insular dwarfism.

HOBBITS MEET HUMANS

Scientific research on the Flores fossils has determined that the Hobbit species went extinct about 50,000 years ago. It was known that *Homo sapiens* were present in south-east Asia around that time, but there was no conclusive evidence that they had been on the island of Flores or had any interaction with *Homo floresiensis* at all.

But a 2016 discovery of a pair of human teeth in the cave of Liang Bua on the island of Flores revealed that *Homo sapiens* were present on the island at least 46,000 years ago, suggesting their occupation did indeed overlap with *Homo floresiensis*. The scientists took it a step further, suggesting that not only did they interact, but humans may have been responsible for their extinction.

"The teeth are slightly younger than the known Hobbit remains, which strengthens the case that humans were responsible for the species' demise," said biomedical report Ewen Callaway. "Other evidence... puts humans in Liang Bua very soon after *Homo floresiensis* vanished, which adds weight to the possibility that humans played a role in the extinction of hobbits, possibly by out-competing them for limited resources on Flores."

While the evidence is far from conclusive, it does help to add another piece to this very complex puzzle. But still many questions remain, if the Flores skeleton does, in fact, represent a unique ancient species, where did it originate and from which species did it descend? How did they get to the island of Flores? Did they interbreed with modern humans? And what was the eventual reason for their disappearance? For now, the answers to all these questions are unknown but perhaps in time we will learn the truth about what many believe is one of our most endearing relatives, the Hobbit.■

PEOPLE have been navigating long distances between islands in the Pacific for thousands of years. But how did they do it without astrolabes, sextants, or modern satellite positioning technology? One group, the Marshall Islanders, used unique stick charts and closely read the sea, its swells, and currents for clues about where the islands were.

Distances between islands in the Marshalls and the rest of Polynesia stretch for hundreds, sometimes thousands of miles in the vast expanse of the Pacific, so navigating these waters is no mean feat.

Marshall Islanders used charts made from bamboo sticks, known as *rebbelib*, to show the currents and wind patterns, and cowrie shells to show the location of the islands. They also used, and still use, a technique called wave-piloting or *di lep*. Wave-piloting to navigate the ocean involves seafarers finding their way between islands by the direction and shape of swells.

Wave pilots know how swells are influenced as they come into contact with the islands. It is a very difficult skill, and there are just a handful of people left who know how to do it.

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration states that: "Modern science is just now beginning to understand and appreciate the traditional Marshallese navigation techniques. With only a few surviving master navigators, it is crucial to pass on this knowledge to their children so this unique maritime heritage will not be lost forever."■

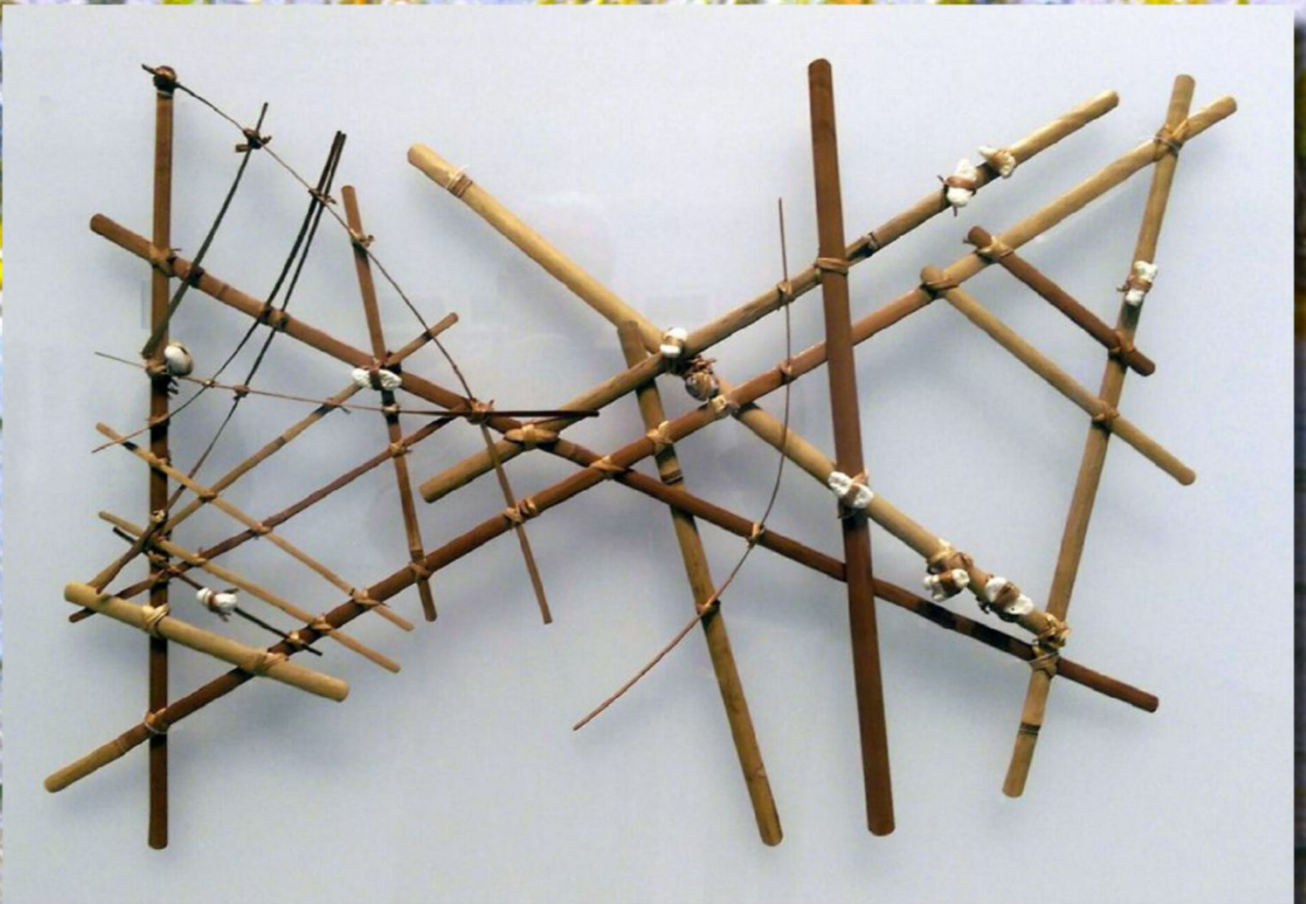
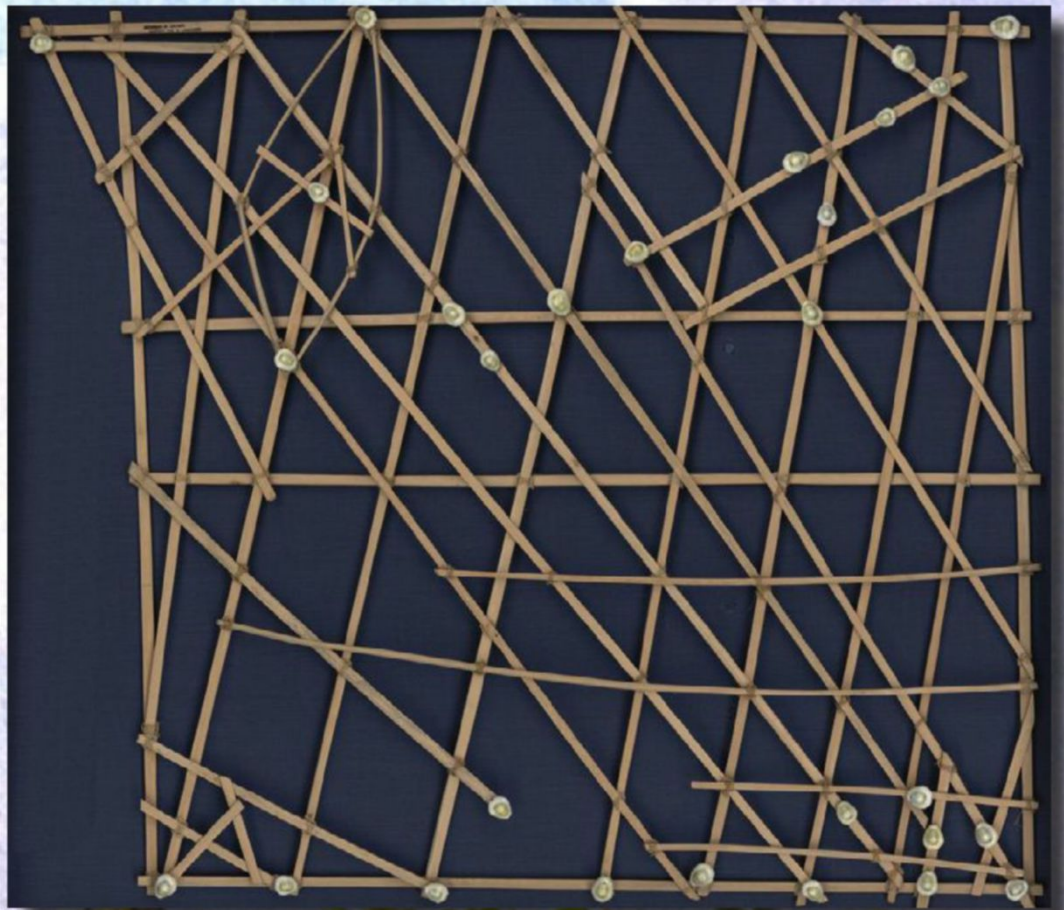
The Remarkable Ancient Navigation System of the Marshall Islands

BY MARK MILLER

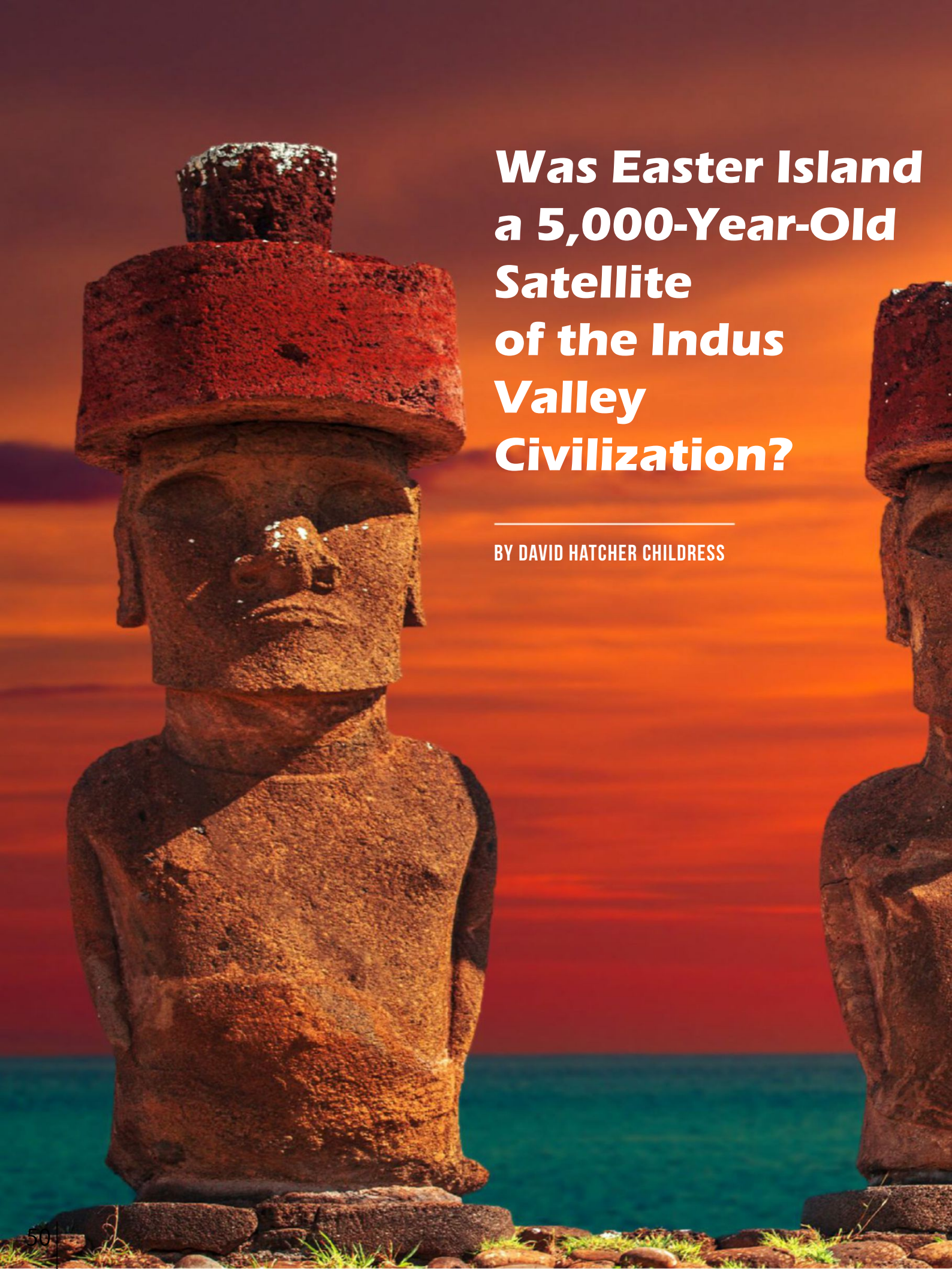
MODERN SCIENCE IS JUST NOW BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND AND APPRECIATE THE TRADITIONAL MARSHALLESE NAVIGATION TECHNIQUES



Right: Marshall Islands navigational stick chart, Rebbelib type. Below: A navigational chart from the Marshall Islands. It is made of wood, sennit fiber, and cowrie shells. | Cullen328/CC BY SA 3.0
Background: A palm-covered atoll with a native sailing craft in the Marshall Islands.





A large, weathered stone Moai statue stands on a rocky shore. The statue has a prominent nose and a large, rectangular headdress. The background is a vibrant sunset with orange and red hues, and the ocean is visible in the distance. Another Moai statue is partially visible on the right side of the frame.

Was Easter Island a 5,000-Year-Old Satellite of the Indus Valley Civilization?

BY DAVID HATCHER CHILDRESS

The background of the entire page is a photograph of two large Moai statues on a beach. The statues are made of dark, weathered stone and are positioned on either side of the page. The sky is a vibrant orange and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The water is visible in the distance, and the foreground shows some rocks and sparse vegetation.

THE high cultural level of the Rapa Nui society is best known for its monumental stone figures (*moai*), assumed to represent ancestral figures and ceremonial shrines (*ahu*); it is also noteworthy for a form of pictographic writing (*rongorongo*), so far undeciphered. It was on a windy spring morning in February 2013 that I stepped off the Lan Peru jet onto the runway on Easter Island/Rapa Nui and I wondered about a few things that seemed to need explaining:

Why did the islanders excavate and move such gigantic statues when smaller ones would have presumably served the same purpose? How were they moved?

Why are the statues buried with up to 30 feet of soil? Was this done on purpose or has thousands of years of soil buildup been created around the statues?

Why did the islanders think that putting statues facing inward around the island would keep it from sinking into the ocean like their lost land of Hiva?

How did they make fine drill holes and saw cuts on some of the stone walls?

Why would a small remote island population invent their own written language? Could such a script be related to other ancient forms of writing?

Could a remote island like Rapa Nui be related to thousands of years of trans-Pacific contact that spanned Asia, Oceania, and the Americas?

The ancient *rongorongo* script, similar to the Indus Valley script:

The writing was first reported by Eugene Eyraud, a French missionary on the island, in 1864. Eyraud sent some specimens to the Archbishop of Tahiti, since he recognized the significance of a written language being developed on a tiny, remote island in the South Pacific, as against all accepted theories of the time. It was generally thought that only peoples with contact with different cultures could rise to a high level of civilization that included written communication. But here at Easter Island, it was then surmised, was a culture that had independently of the rest of the world developed writing, art, megalithic construction and more.

The notion that a few hundred people should create all that without the aid of the outside world was astounding, and still is.

At the time of Eyraud, a few of the 'royalty' were known to still be able to read the *rongorongo* tablets. The French author and archaeologist Francis Maziere claimed in his book *The Mysteries of Easter Island* (1965) that Gabriel Veriveri, the last initiate of the *rongorongo* tablets who died of leprosy, had once told him: "The first race invented the *rongorongo* writing. They wrote it in stone. Of the four parts of the world that were inhabited by the first race it is only in Asia that the writing still exists." Veriveri was apparently speaking of the Indus Valley culture and the writing at Mohenjo Daro and other cities: "The island's first race was once to be found on two Polynesian Islands, in one part of Asia and one part of Africa where there are live volcanoes."

THE NOTION THAT A FEW HUNDRED PEOPLE SHOULD CREATE ALL THAT WITHOUT THE AID OF THE OUTSIDE WORLD WAS ASTOUNDING, AND STILL IS.

Today, the only active volcanoes in Africa exist along the Great Rift Valley at the borders of Zaire, Rwanda, and Burundi.

There are two volcanoes, Nyiragongo and Nyamulgira (or Nyamuragira).

Little is known of this strange *rongorongo* script which includes pictographic and geometric shapes; often the figures are of a birdman with his arms and legs in various positions. The script was written in the unusual boustrophedon pattern of writing where the successive lines are read ('as the ox plows') alternately left to right and then right to left. Certain older forms of Greek, such as Doric Greek, as well as Etruscan, Sabaean, Safaitic, Hittite and possibly Indus Valley writing such as that from Harrapa or Mohenjo Daro, were written in the boustrophedon pattern.

Polish researcher and author Igor Witkowski examines *rongorongo* writing in his book *Axis of the World* (2008). Witkowski quotes the legend:

"...the first king, Hotu Matua, brought with him 67 most precious tablets from their land of origin in the west. We can only suppose that they contained the 'core' of their religious, and perhaps historical texts. It is also known that he brought the religion tied with the 'bird-man' and with *Make Make*. It has generally nothing in common with the different variants of purely Polynesian beliefs, based on the cult of the Tane and Kon Tiki gods. All in all, presently we know of 26 various genuine artifacts covered with the *rongorongo* hieroglyphs. They contain around 16,000 signs in all. This similarity in writing gives us something that resembles a chain of traces from the Indus Valley (the capital of which was the city of Mohenjo Daro, located in today's Pakistan), to Easter Island itself, and on to Tiahuanaco on the Andean altiplano—over 2,300 miles farther to the East. Incidentally, these

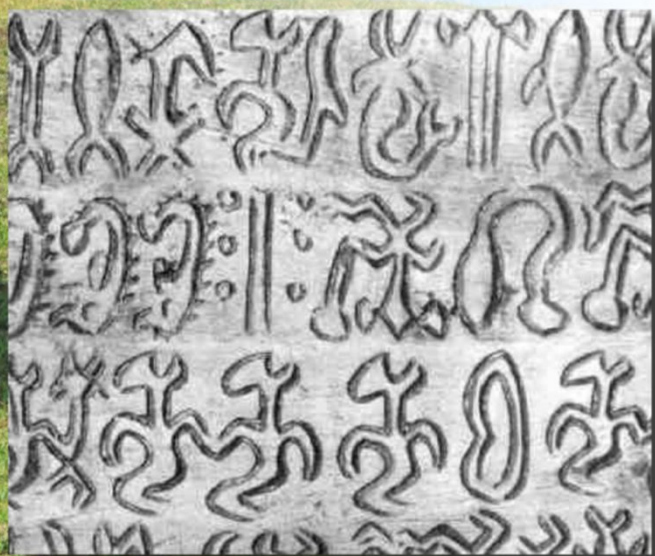
circumstances make the *rongorongo* script the oldest system of writing in use in historical times, for no less than 4,000 years."

Witkowski credits Professor Benon Z. Szalek from the University of Szczecin (Poland) with being the 'decoder' of the *rongorongo* writing. In 1974, Professor Szalek found similarities between Hungarian, Japanese, and English, and then Basque, Japanese, and English. Wikowski says that Professor Szalek came to the conclusion: "that these peoples must have been subjected to the influence of some single state organism—or that they were once part of it."

A Hungarian scholar named de Hevseg made a comparison of the writing on Easter Island and that found at the Indus Valley civilization cities of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa. These cities existed at about 4000 BC, if not earlier, and the culture literally vanished about 3500 BC. That *rongorongo* writing is very similar, if not identical, to this ancient, undeciphered language, is extraordinary. They are precisely on opposite sides of the earth: Mohenjo Daro is located at 27°23' North and about 69° East; Easter Island is at 27°08' South and 109°23' West. No other land area could be farther away from the Indus Valley cities as Easter Island.

The script at Mohenjo Daro is now believed to be related to ancient Dravidian, the fragments of this language still existing in southern India in the language of Tamil. Walter Fairservis, Jr. in *The Script of the Indus Valley Civilization*, (*Scientific American* vol. 248, No. 3, March 1983) says that there are 419 'signs' and that the script is neither alphabetic (as in Sanskrit or English) or logographic (as in Chinese) but rather logo-syllabic, meaning that some signs represent words and others serve purely for their symbolic value or sounds. Other examples of such writing are Egyptian hieroglyphs, early Sumerian ideographs, and modern Japanese. It has also been noted that some early Shang Dynasty symbols (1600 - 1046 BC) found in 'oracle bone script' from central China are also similar to *rongorongo*.

Another curious object with writing on it is the Fuente Magna Bowl (circa 3000 BC), currently housed at the Gold and Precious Metals Museum in La Paz, Bolivia—said to have been found near Tiwanaku—has Sumerian cuneiform writing on it, as well as early Sumerian hieroglyphs that were in use before cuneiform.

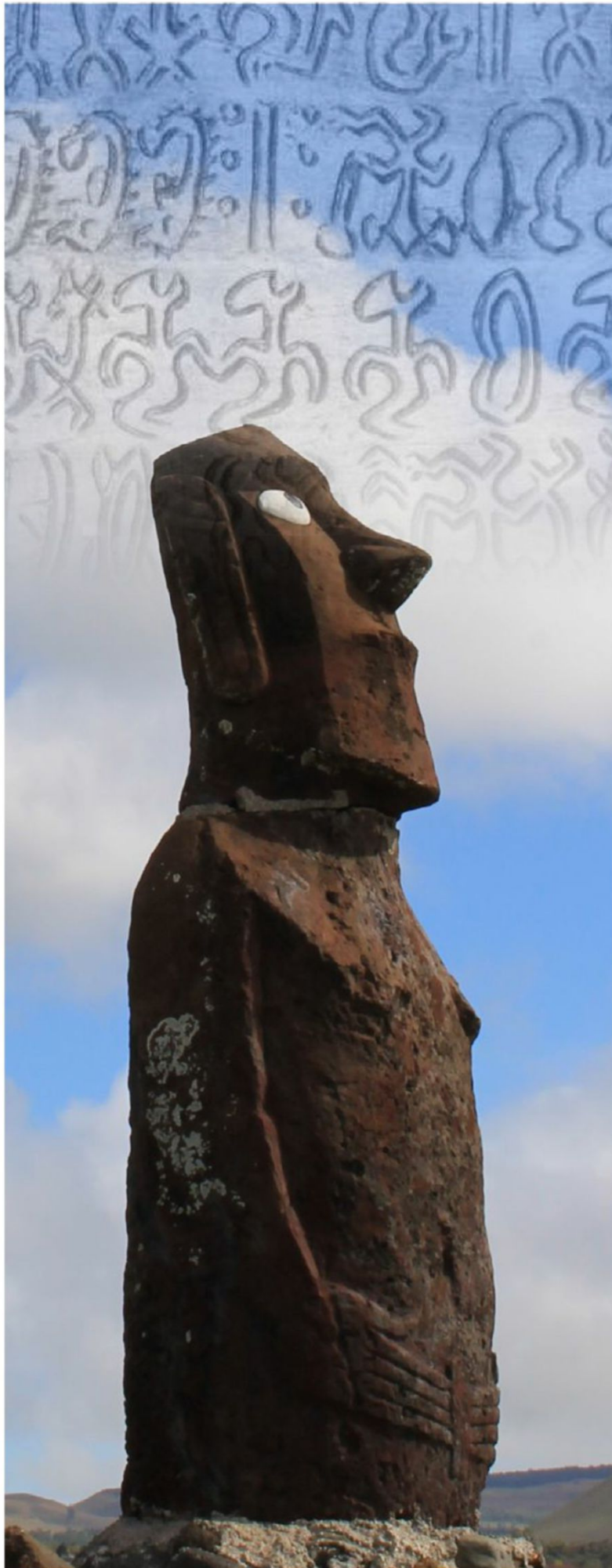


The rongorongo script of Easter Island.

MOHENJO DARO IS AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE IN THE PROVINCE OF SINDH, PAKISTAN. BUILT AROUND 2500 BCE, IT WAS ONE OF THE LARGEST SETTLEMENTS OF THE ANCIENT INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION







THE MAOI STATUES: CALLING ANCIENT ANCESTORS

Currently, 887 statues of various sizes (some gigantically huge) have been inventoried on the island, and most are still around the quarry. Many of these are leaning over or have fallen. According to the UNESCO website: “some have large cylindrical pieces of red stone known as pukao, extracted from the small volcano Punapao, as headdresses: these are believed to denote special ritual status. There is a clear stylistic evolution in the form and size of the *moai*, from the earlier small, round-headed and round-eyed figures to the best-known large, elongated figures with carefully carved fingers, nostrils, long ears, and other features”.

Often, they are buried under dozens of feet of shifting soil. The question arises, where did all this shifting soil originate from, since these statues are up against sheer cliff walls of the quarry that are virtually devoid of soil? When one of the large *moai* statues was completely uncovered by archaeologists in 2011, many people were astonished that the *moai* were not just heads, but have even larger bodies beneath the soil. Were they only 400 years old or were they thousands of years old—buried by the dust of time?

While Easter Island is thought to have been first discovered and inhabited by Polynesians (probably coming from the Marquesas Islands, north of Tahiti) around 300 AD, it is generally thought by mainstream archaeologists that the time of the excavation and movement of the *moai* statues was 1100-1680 AD. This is based on radio-carbon dating of wood, bone, and shell that has been found buried in and around the statues and the quarry of Rano Raraku. However, it is uncertain how deep these objects were buried, and they might have been placed there after the statues had been carved.

As I looked at my notes and thought about this first question concerning Easter Island, it seemed possible to me that these statues might have been carved by Sumerians who brought the Fuente Magna Bowl to Tiwanaku around 3000 BC—making them an astonishing 5,000 years old. While people may have been around these statues 500 years ago, leaving all sorts of datable material for later analysis, they are not necessarily the sculptors of these statues. The *moai* may have been standing there then as enigmatically as they stand there today.

On a slope of the volcano stood a dozen 20-foot-tall *moai*, buried up to their waists or chests. One *moai* that Heyerdahl had excavated in 1956 has a masted ship on its stomach. Heyerdahl believed that this was an ancient sailing ship used by explorers who came from Peru. Others say that

the ship is an early carving of a European ship that visited the island. The only problem with this explanation is that the carving was only discovered after Heyerdahl had dug the soil around it away. It seems likely that the several feet of soil that had amassed over the drawing would have taken hundreds of years to accumulate.

The statues seem, originally, to have been standing on the slope just as they are found today and were typically 40 to 50 feet tall. Indeed, some stood as tall as a seven-story building, and the largest, still in the quarry, was more than 70 feet tall. Therefore, it would seem that the carving of the ship on the belly of one of the statues would be far older than the discovery of the island in 1722. The statue itself must be centuries older than that.

I was immediately struck by the fact that the crater and the statues around it were quite different from the *moais* and ruins around the rest of the island. While the *moais* that were erected on platforms around the edge of the island were put there to protect the island, the purpose of these statues around the crater was something else. I wondered at the large lichen spots on all of these statues. Lichen eats living rock and grows very slowly; fractions of an inch over hundreds of years. Ages of rocks are sometimes estimated by how large the lichen patches on them are. A large lichen patch would suggest that these statues were thousands of years old. In an effort to check this out, I measured lichen patches on uncut rock. They were only slightly larger than those on the statues themselves.



Lichen on the Easter Island Moai. Photo © David Hatcher Childress

THE MYSTERIOUSLY MISSING RIKIRIKI

At Orongo, I scanned the cliffs to the south along Rano Kau for the elusive *ahu* and statues of Rikiriki ('very small, very little' in Rapa Nuian). In 1889, William Judah Thomson visited Easter Island for the Smithsonian Institution and wrote in the paper published by them in 1891 called *Te Pito Te Henua, or Easter Island*, that Ahu Rikiriki was a statue at the extreme southwest end of the island which was placed midway between the sea and the top—on the face of a perpendicular cliff nearly 1000 feet high. Thompson states that 16 small statues are lying on this platform and seem to be in excellent condition: "We could find no way of reaching the narrow ledge upon which this platform stands. No roads lead down from the top; it cannot be approached from either side, and from below it is a straight up and down wall against which the sea dashes continually. It is hardly probable that the images were lowered from the top by ropes, and the natural conclusion is, that a roadway once existed..."

Mysteriously, no trace of this platform or the statues has been found since, although the British

traveler Katherine Routledge reported in 1919 that the statues were then lying at the floor of the cliff, presumably in the water. However, many researchers now question whether this remarkable *ahu* ever existed. When Jacques Cousteau came to Easter Island, he performed several important investigations. One was diving around the island searching for statues and other possible artifacts in the ocean. The presence of statues in the ocean, he believed, would prove the theory that the statues had been moved around the island using rafts. He found none. The only unusual feature he discovered was underwater tunnels, which he theorized to be volcanic in origin.

He mentions that the oldest carbon date on the island is 690 AD at a 'well-developed site,' indicating actual habitation must be older. He also noted the songs of the island were 'reminiscent of the Epic songs of India and China,' and that the Islanders practiced cremation of the dead until wood became too scarce. Other ancient cultures that cremated the dead were Hindus, Atonists of Egypt, and Nestorian Christians.

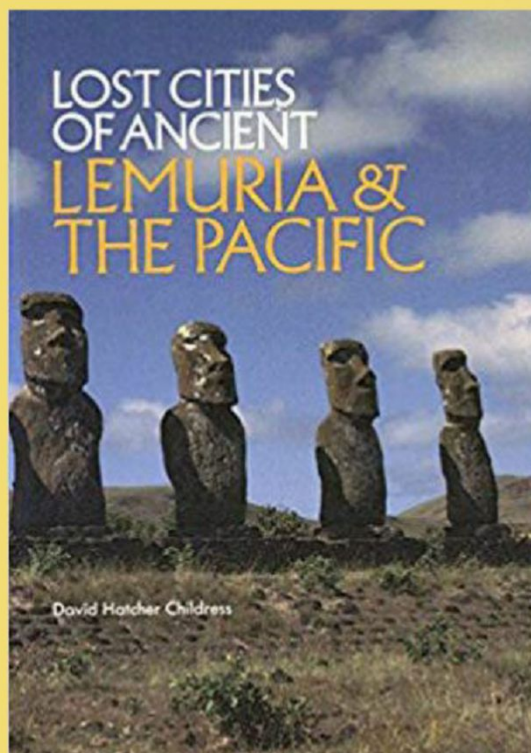
Lost Cities of Ancient Lemuria & the Pacific

By David Hatcher Childress

Was there once a continent in the Pacific? Called Lemuria or Pacifica by geologists, Mu or Pan by the mystics, there is now ample mythological, geological and archaeological evidence to "prove" that an advanced, and ancient civilization once lived in the central Pacific.

Maverick archaeologist and explorer David Hatcher Childress combs the Indian Ocean, Australia and the Pacific in search of the surprising truth about mankind's past.

Contains photos of the underwater city on Pohnpei; explanations on how the statues were levitated around Easter Island in a clockwise vortex movement; tales of disappearing islands; Egyptians in Australia; and more.



David Hatcher Childress, 1988, AUP, Kempton, IL, USA

davidhatcherchildress.com



A View of the Monuments of Easter Island, Rapanui, c. 1775-1776 by William Hodges.
This is the earliest known painting of Easter Island.



Ahu Vinapu, Easter Island, Chile.



A part of Ahu Vinapu, showing the precision of the stonemasonry. | Signalhead/CC BY SA 3.0

THE RUINS OF VINAPU: A VIMANA LANDING PAD?

The stone ruins of Vinapu, at the end of the airport's huge airstrip (built long enough to land a space shuttle in case of an emergency) provides a key clue in unraveling the mystery of Easter Island. Vinapu consists of a partially-destroyed wall with megalithic construction that is basically unique to the island, but not unique in the world. The main wall consists of enormous slabs very skillfully laid. I stood in front of the wall and was genuinely amazed at the construction which was not just similar, but identical to that at Cuzco, Machu Picchu, Sacsayhuaman, and Ollantaytambo in the high Andes of Peru.

Like those constructions, the wall at Vinapu is perfectly fitted together with irregularly-shaped stones and has rounded edges, with small triangular stones filling in gaps. One would describe the construction in the Andes the same way; polygonal blocks that were smoothed and rounded, perfectly cut and fitted together, with small keystones placed in the wall to help make it earthquake proof. It is the most sophisticated construction technique in the world, essentially unduplicated today. It is often said that the construction at Vinapu is identical to that of Tiwanaku, although Tiwanaku lacks the pillowed walls, which are mainly found around Cuzco. However,

pillowed or rounded walls can be found at the ruins of Sillustani and Cutimbo, both on mesas—flat topped mountains—near Lake Titicaca, which are usually said to be of Tiwanaku origin.

Probably the confusion arises from the general consensus that Tiwanaku is of pre-Incan construction and is thousands of years old. The massive ruins found in Peru, many in the vicinity of Cuzco, a still-living city, are usually said by academics to have been built by the Incas a few hundred years

ago. That the ruins at Vinapu on Easter Island are identical in construction then raises the unlikely notion that the Incas built the platform.

The answer is simpler than might be thought. While the Incas did indeed construct large cities and were excellent stonemasons, their construction is with small rectangular blocks that are perfectly

fitted together. This construction can be seen in Cuzco and elsewhere on top of the earlier and larger, polygonal construction. The constructions therefore that I am speaking about, found at Easter Island and the Peruvian Andes around Cuzco—both places called 'the navel of the world' (coincidentally?)—are apparently built by the same mysterious people, and are pre-Incan. Considering the lichen growth on the wall at Vinapu, I would venture to say they lived thousands of years ago.

THE MAIN WALL CONSISTS OF ENORMOUS SLABS VERY SKILLFULLY LAID



Ollantaytambo ruins in the sacred valley, Peru.

I walked around the wall and examined the construction. It was not until I had looked at each block carefully that I noticed something that confirmed my suspicions about the builders of this wonderful, ancient structure. At Ollantaytambo, Sillustani, Cuzco, and other sites in the Andes, many of the large polygonal blocks have strange knobs on them, the function of which has never been understood. Here, on the southeast corner of the wall was a knob, just like the ones in the Andes! The corner, too, was rounded, and in fact, so was the entire face of the wall, again just like in the Andes.

The upper levels of the platform and a portion of the center had been torn down. It was obvious that it had been used as a *moai* platform at one time, and one *moai* was toppled over on the top.

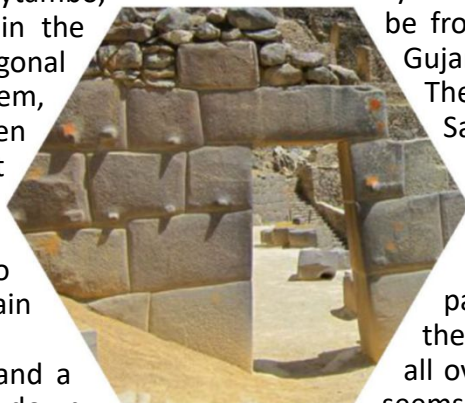
The stones around the statue were of cruder construction, identical to that on the rest of the island.

I concluded, as I sat in the grass and looked at the wall, that it was much older than the rest of the platforms on the island, and was not originally constructed to be an ahu-platform for a *moai*. What then was its purpose?

I surmised that Vinapu was part of the original purpose of Easter Island, along with the gigantic statues in Rano Raraku and the ceremonial site there. The other *moais* and platforms were built later, possibly in an effort to call back the ancients who had abandoned the island, or just to protect the island as legend said. I thought back to the legends of

Atlantis and the Rama Empire. *Rongorongo* writing has been shown to be identical to Indus Valley writing found at the ancient Rama Empire cities of Mohenjo Daro, Harappa, and Lothal. The ancient city of Dwarka, where Krishna is said to be from, is underwater off the coast of Gujarat.

The Rapa Nui legends share with Sanskrit the same word for mental powers: 'mana'. Meanwhile, we have the tales of fantastic battles, flying machines, and a technology and culture that in some ways surpasses our own. Just as we do today, these cultures had the ability to travel all over the world, by air and by sea. It seems likely, therefore, that they did so. *Vimanas* were said to take off and land vertically, as a hovercraft, zeppelin, or 'flying saucer' might. Whether this is true, I do not know. However, the thought of a world-wide network of 'vimana landing pads' stretching from ancient India to the massive platform of Baalbek in Lebanon (here are found the largest cut blocks of stone in the world, estimated to weigh 1000 tons or more) to Abydos in Egypt to Sacsayhuaman in Peru, to, dare I say, Easter Island, is astounding! Could the platform at Vinapu be what is left of an ancient vimana landing pad? The idea seems incredible!■



Top: Strange stone knobs on the ruins of Ollantaytambo, Peru.

Center: Manuscript illustration (18th century) of the aerial Battle of Kurukshetra, recorded in the Mahabharata Epic.





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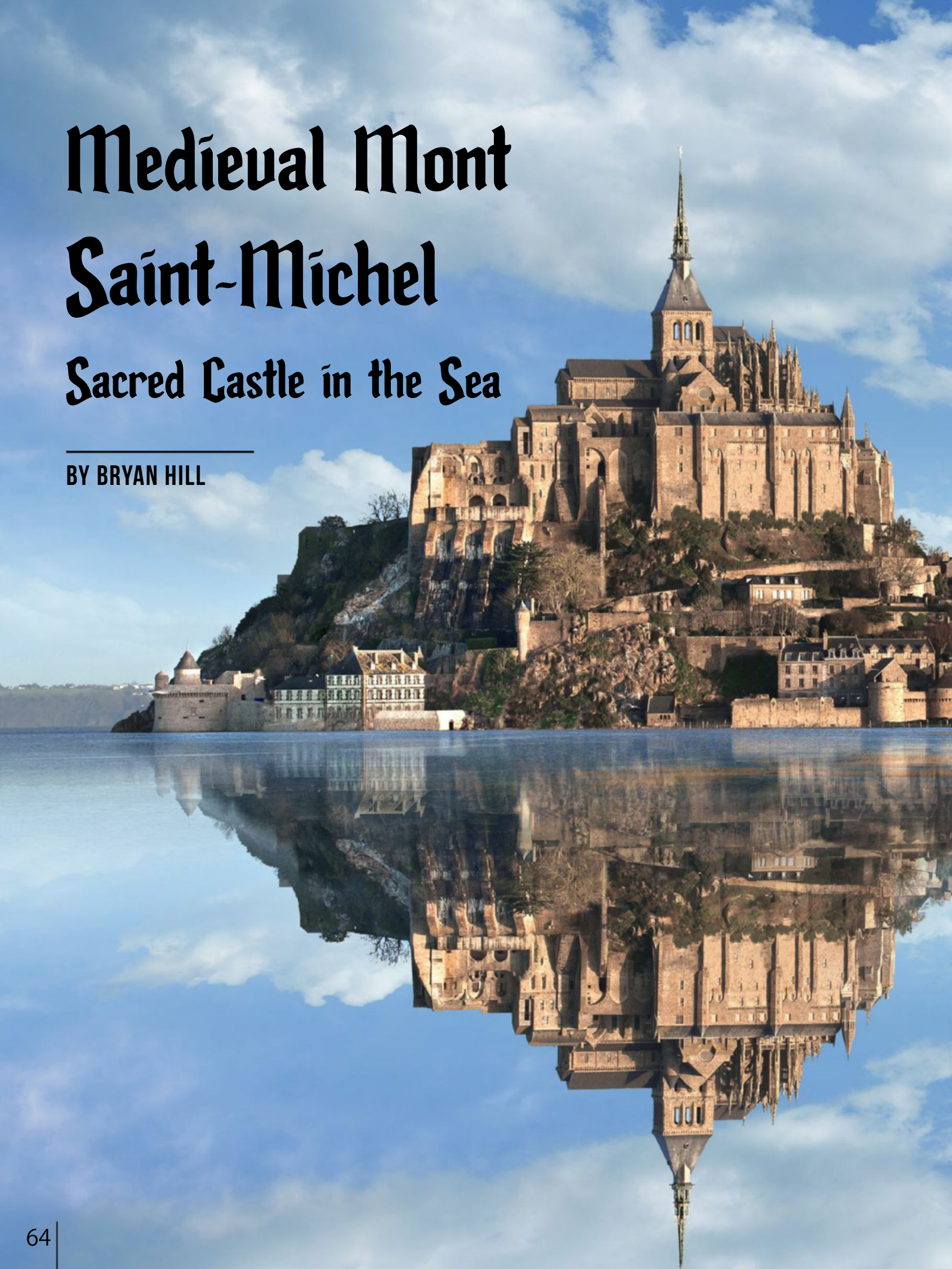
Dare to Discover the Entrance to the Underworld

Ancient Origins PREMIUM EXPEDITION to TAYOS CAVES Ecuador
INVESTIGATE unexplored areas of the CAVE SYSTEM searching for
man-made STRUCTURES PETROGLYPHS ARTIFACTS related to
the LEGENDARY accounts of Tayos and DISCOVER possible
ANCIENT STRUCTURES

Medieval Mont Saint-Michel

Sacred Castle in the Sea

BY BRYAN HILL



CONSIDERED one of the wonders of the Western World, Mont Saint-Michel is a medieval fortress in France, sitting on top of a rocky island in the ocean. Floating like a mirage on the horizon, this sacred monastery is truly a one-of-a-kind site.

People have been living here for well over a thousand years, and throughout its existence the island has served as a strategic fortress, prison, and place of pilgrimage, attracting Christian pilgrims from across the world. The centerpiece of Mont Saint-Michel is its church, a medieval 'skyscraper' which was inspired by a dream.

Perched on top of a 264-foot rock formation, Mont Saint-Michel is located on the north coast of France, where the regions of Normandy and Brittany meet. What makes this monument so striking is its location.

Like something out of a fairy tale, Mont Saint-Michel is a granite island in the center of a huge bay, connected by a causeway to the mainland (a path uncovered only at low tide).

During the highest of tides, it is completely surrounded by water. The water here can rush in at incredible speeds and rise up to 45 feet during high tide. An unsuspecting pedestrian could easily get caught unawares by the sudden shift.

In prehistoric times, the bay where the monastery now sits was part of the coastline. Over millions of years, rising sea levels led to erosion which tore down and shaped the coastal landscape. Some blocks of granite resisted the wear and tear of the ocean better than its surroundings, which is why Mont Saint-Michel, together with a few other rocks, remains standing tall in an otherwise ever-changing landscape.

The origins of Mont Saint-Michel date back to the sixth and seventh century AD when Armorican Gauls used the island as a stronghold of Breton culture and power. During this time, the island was known as "Monte Tombe".

When the Romans left Britannia (today's United Kingdom) in the mid-fifth century, many Britons crossed the channel due to fear of the increasing Anglo-Saxon influence in their former home country. This emigration is the reason why the French region is called Bretagne or in English, "Brittany". The Monte Tombe served as a stronghold until it was later sacked by the Franks, which ended the era of Celtic cultural links between Britannia and Bretagne.

In October 708 AD, the bishop of Avranches, Saint Aubert, ordered a small church to be built on the site. The arrival of the cult of Saint Michael is recounted in a 10th-century manuscript called *La Revelatio ecclesiae sancti Michaelis*.

According to the legend, one night in 708 AD, Saint Aubert saw the Archangel Michael (leader of the armies of heaven) in a dream, who commanded him to build a church on top of the island. There is a golden statue of Saint Michael which can be seen at the top of the church spire.



Building the monastery was an immense project that evolved over many centuries. The construction of the abbey took more than 500 years, from 1017 to 1521 AD, and the original church structure was completed in 1144 AD. Other buildings were added in the 13th century to accommodate monks and pilgrims who came to Mont Saint-Michel to pray and find solitude.

In the beginning, Mont Saint-Michel resembled a typical 11th-century Romanesque church but, like many other churches during that period, it was affected by the wave of gothic architecture that spread throughout Europe. Today, the church is seen as gothic in style with Gothic pointed arches and windows that fill the sanctuary with light.

Throughout the Middle Ages, a village grew up around the church, mostly on the eastern side of the island, and today around 30 to 50 residents make their home here. Its main street is lined with shops and hotels, and during the Middle Ages, this was a retail gauntlet with stalls selling souvenirs and fast food such as omelets and crepes.

In 966 AD, a community of monks from western Europe, called Benedictines, settled on the rock at the request of the Duke of Normandy. After the Norman conquest of England in 1066 AD, the church gave its support to Duke William of

Normandy and his claim to the English throne. This resulted in the church gaining both political and financial power which further expanded the construction on Mont Saint-Michel.

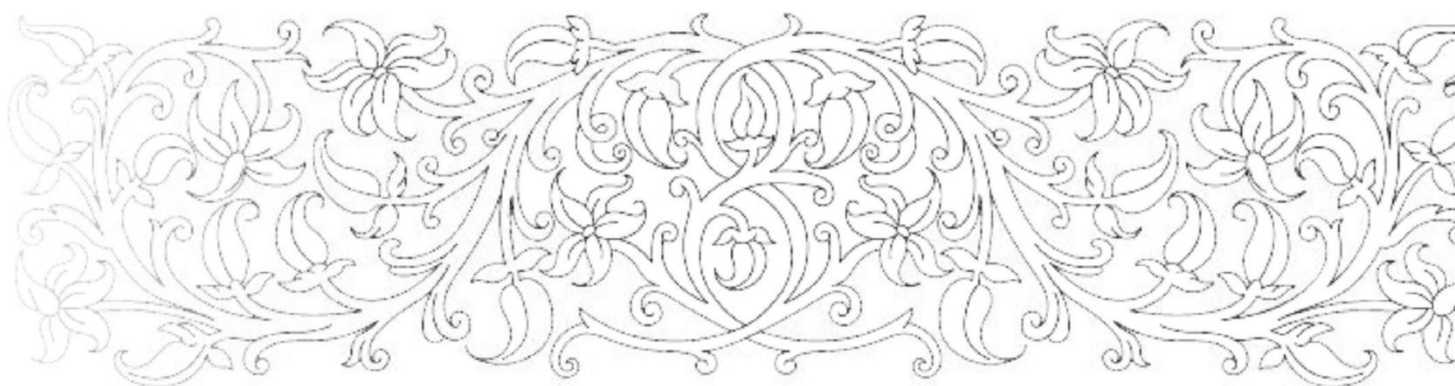
In the 14th century, during the Hundred Years War between France and England, the church and its village were fortified in order to fend off attacks by the English. Walls were built to defend against a new kind of weapon, (the cannon) and were constructed low rather than high to make for a smaller target. While the English took all the rest of Normandy, they assaulted Mont Saint-Michel several times, but were never able to conquer this well-fortified island. Because of its stubborn defense against the English through the War, Mont Saint-Michel became a symbol of French national identity. Beginning with the Reformation in the early 16th century, its popularity began to decrease. By the time of the French revolution, there were hardly any monks left at Mont Saint-Michel. After the revolution, the church closed and was converted into a prison in 1793 AD, where it held religious and political prisoners of the new regime.

In 1836, a campaign was launched to restore the site as a national architectural landmark. This led to the closure of the prison in 1874 AD when the



island was turned over to the Historic Monuments Department and declared a historic monument. Since then, it has been open to the public all year round.

In the late 1960s, a religious community moved back into the monastery and Friars and Sisters from *Les Fraternités Monastiques de Jérusalem* have been ensuring a spiritual presence here since 2001. Currently, monks live and work at the site just like they did during medieval times. In 1979, Mont Saint-Michel was designated a world heritage site by UNESCO and today it entertains over three million visitors a year. It is one of the most important sites in Europe as well as the most popular tourist attraction in France outside of Paris.■



Mont Saint-Michel's Cornish Counterpart

Across the English Channel from Mont Saint-Michel, in Mount's Bay, Cornwall, lies an almost identical island that carries the same name in English – Saint Michael's Mount.

Both islands have colorful histories that trace back many centuries. They both carry a legend about being surrounded by a forest that was swallowed by the sea, as well as a story about being chosen as the location for a church by Saint Michael. They share the same conical shape, and both islands can only be reached by foot during low tide. For this reason, tourists frequently confuse the two islands when booking their travels and sightseeing tours!

The connection between the two islands is not just in legends and looks. Saint Michael's Mount was, allegedly, gifted to the Benedictine religious order of Mont Saint-Michel by Edward the Confessor in the 11th century. However, some historians maintain that the document recording the gift was concocted by monks after the Norman Conquest so that the Normans wouldn't be tempted to give Saint Michael's Mount away or use it for their own purposes.





An aerial photograph of the Spis Castle ruins. The castle's stone walls are visible, forming a large rectangular enclosure with a circular structure in the center. The surrounding landscape is green and hilly, with a small town and mountains in the background.

Spis Castle

13th-century Europe was under attack by the Mongols, and the Kingdom of Hungary was right in the sights of the invaders! Something had to be done, and the creation of great fortified castles was one way to resist this mighty force. Spis Castle is situated in the north-eastern Slovakian region of Presov, once marking the northern boundary of the Kingdom of Hungary. It dates back to the 12th century AD, when it was constructed on the site of an earlier hill-fort. New structures were added over time, eventually transforming the castle from being a powerful military structure to a comfortable residence for its owners. It was destroyed by a fire during the 18th century and was subsequently abandoned. Fortunately, intervention during the 1970s prevented the total decay of the castle.

Tomas Hulik | Adobe Stock





The Ancient Origins of Easter Traditions

BY JOANNA GILLAN

EASTER is a festival and holiday celebrated by millions of people around the world who honor the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, described in the New Testament as having occurred three days after his crucifixion at Calvary. It is also the day that children excitedly wait for the Easter bunny to arrive and deliver their treats of chocolate eggs.

Easter is a 'movable feast' which is chosen to correspond with the first Sunday following the full moon after the March equinox and occurs on different dates around the world since western churches use the Gregorian calendar, while eastern churches use the Julian calendar. Most historians, including Biblical scholars, agree that Easter was originally a pagan festival. According to the New Unger's Bible Dictionary: "The word Easter is of Saxon origin, Eastr, the goddess of spring, in whose honor sacrifices were offered about Passover time each year. By the eighth century Anglo-Saxons had adopted the name to designate the celebration of Christ's resurrection." However, even among those who maintain that Easter has pagan roots, there is some disagreement over which pagan tradition the festival emerged from.

RESURRECTION AS A SYMBOL OF REBIRTH

One theory that has been put forward is that the Easter story of crucifixion and resurrection is symbolic of rebirth and renewal and retells the cycle of the seasons, and the death and return of the sun.

According to some scholars, such as Dr. Tony Nugent, teacher of Theology and Religious Studies at Seattle University and Presbyterian minister, the Easter story comes from the Sumerian legend of Damuzi (Tammuz)

and his wife Inanna (Ishtar), an epic myth called "The Descent of Inanna" found inscribed on cuneiform clay tablets dating back to 2100 BC. When Damuzi dies, Inanna is grief-stricken and follows him to the underworld. In the underworld, she enters through seven gates, and her worldly attire is removed. "Naked and bowed low" she is judged, killed, and then

hung on display. In her absence, the earth loses its fertility, crops cease to grow and animals stop reproducing. Unless something is done, all life on earth will end.

After Inanna has been missing for three days, her assistant goes to other gods for help. Finally one of them, Enki, creates two creatures who carry the plant of life and water of life down to the underworld, sprinkling them on Inanna and Damuzi, resurrecting them, and giving them the power to return to the earth as the light of the sun for six months. After the six months are up, Damuzi returns to the underworld of the dead, remaining there for another six months, and Inanna pursues him, prompting the water god to rescue them both. Thus were the cycles of winter death and spring life.

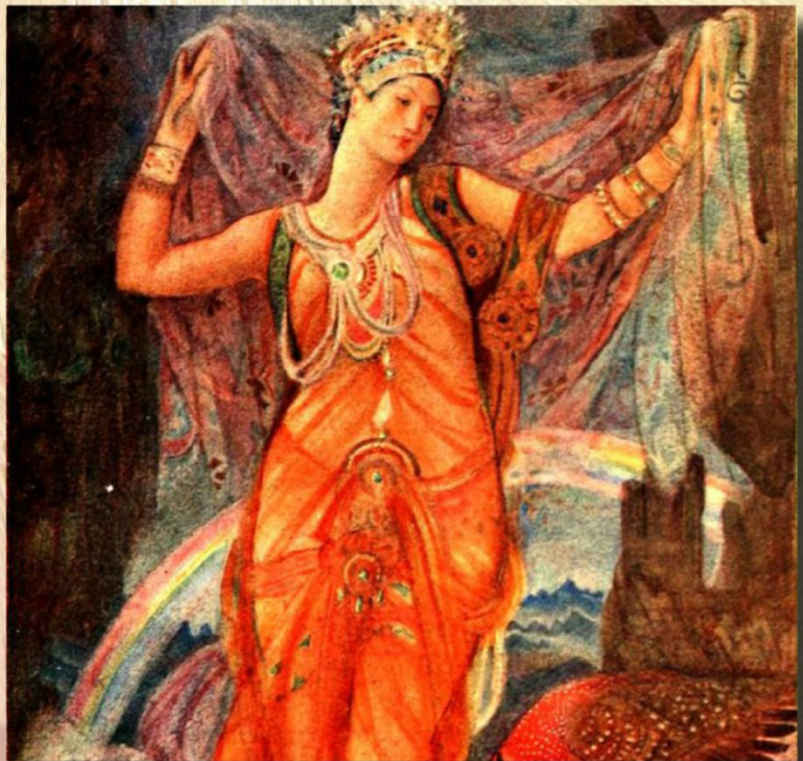
Dr. Nugent is quick to point out that drawing parallels between the story of Jesus and the epic of Inanna "doesn't necessarily mean that there wasn't a real person, Jesus, who was crucified, but rather that, if there was, the story about it is structured and embellished in accordance with a pattern that was very ancient and widespread."

The Sumerian goddess Inanna is known outside of Mesopotamia by her Babylonian name, "Ishtar". In ancient Canaan, Ishtar is known as Astarte,

THE EASTER STORY OF CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION IS SYMBOLIC OF REBIRTH AND RENEWAL AND RETELLS THE CYCLE OF THE SEASONS, AND THE DEATH AND RETURN OF THE SUN



Depiction of Inanna/Ishtar. Naked woman holding her breasts, between circa 1300 and 1100 BC. | Rama/CC BY SA 2.0 fr



Inanna-Ishtar's descent into the Underworld .Myths and legends of Babylonia and Assyria, 1916.

and her counterparts in the Greek and Roman pantheons are known as Aphrodite and Venus. In the fourth Century, when Christians identified the exact site in Jerusalem where the empty tomb of Jesus had been located, they selected the spot where a temple of Aphrodite (Astarte/Ishtar/Inanna) stood. The temple was torn down and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was built, the holiest church in the Christian world.

Dr. Nugent points out that the story of Inanna and Damuzi is just one of a number of accounts of dying and rising gods that represent the cycle of the seasons and the stars. For example, the resurrection of Egyptian Horus; the story of Mithras, who was worshiped at Spring time; and the tale of Dionysus, resurrected by his grandmother. Among these stories are prevailing themes of fertility, conception, renewal, descent into darkness, and the triumph of light over darkness or good over evil.



EASTER AS A CELEBRATION OF THE GODDESS OF SPRING

A related perspective is that, rather than being a representation of the story of Ishtar, Easter was originally a celebration of Eostre, goddess of Spring, otherwise known as Ostara, Austrá, and Eastre. One of the most revered aspects of Ostara for both ancient and modern observers is a spirit of renewal.

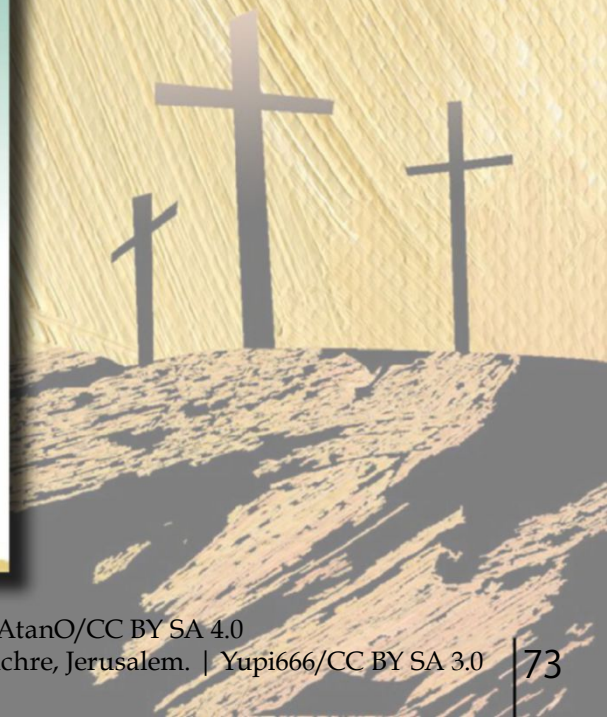
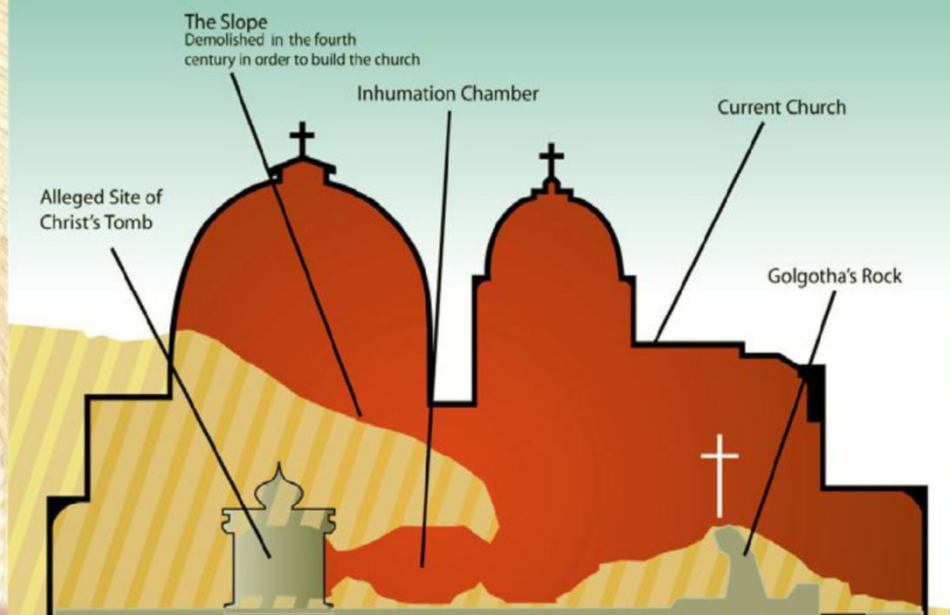
Celebrated at Spring Equinox on March 21, Ostara marks the day when light is equal to darkness, and will continue to grow. As the bringer of light after a long dark winter, the goddess was often depicted with the hare, an animal that represents the arrival of Spring as well as the fertility of the season.

According to Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie*, the idea of resurrection was ingrained within the celebration of Ostara: "Ostara, Eástre seems, therefore, to have been the divinity of the radiant dawn, of upspringing light, a spectacle that brings joy and blessing, whose meaning could be easily adapted by the resurrection-day of the Christian's God."

Most analyses of the origin of the word 'Easter' agree that it was named after Eostre, an ancient word meaning 'spring', though many European languages use one form or another of the Latin name for Easter, Pascha, which is derived from the Hebrew Pesach, meaning Passover.

Calvary

In the first century AD
it was just a rocky
denivellation outside the town



The Tradition of the Jewish Pesach

Enveloped in Ancient Ritual and Meaning

BY MICKI PISTORIUS

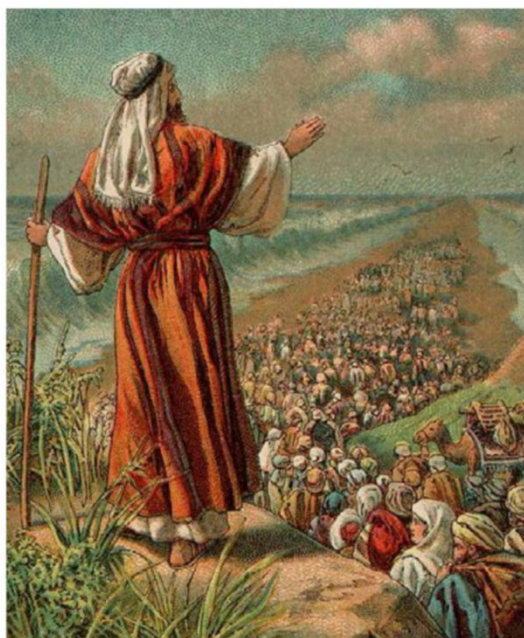
Nisan (April) is the month when the Jewish community celebrates *Pesach* or Passover, to commemorate the event when God sent Moses to lead them from Egypt and free them from slavery around 1300 BC, as recorded by the book of Exodus in the Hebrew Bible. All are familiar with the ten plagues which scourged Egypt and the pharaoh finally consenting to Moses' plea 'let my people go' when his first-born son died. The Jews were warned to paint the blood of lambs on their doors, for the Spirit of the Lord to *pass over* their homes and not claim their first-born for death.

Pesach is a Spring festival, which usually falls on the 15th day of Nisan, but in ancient Israel the week-long festival would not begin until the barley was ripe, confirming Spring. A family was expected to offer a sacrificial Passover lamb (*korban Pesach* in Hebrew) at the Temple in Jerusalem and eat it on the night of the 15th. None of the bones of the offering were to be broken and the whole lamb had to be consumed by morning, but apostates, servants, uncircumcised men, and unclean persons were forbidden to join in the feasting of the lamb. However, women enjoyed equal status to men in

consuming the lamb. The lamb was eaten with unleavened bread.

In their haste to leave Egypt when Moses gave the order to evacuate, the Jews could not wait for their bread dough to rise. Passover is called the 'feast of unleavened bread' in the Torah and so even today, Jews eat matzos, or flat unleavened bread, in remembrance. Matzo is also called the 'bread of poverty', to remind Jews of their poor ancestors who were subjected to slavery, and to instill humility. Before the advent of *Pesach*, households are commanded by the Torah to remove all *chametz* (leavening agents) from the house. The ritual of the search for unleavened agents is called *bedikat chametz* and is conducted by candlelight, using a feather (to sweep hidden corners) and a spoon (to scoop up any crumbs) preceded by a special prayer.

The *seder* or special dinner the first night of *Pesach*, is complemented with many rituals beginning with the Kiddush blessing and drinking the first cup of wine, washing hands, dipping *karpas* (parsley or celery) in salt water, and retelling the story of *Pesach*, including the phrase: Why is tonight different from other nights?" The dinner ends with *Hallel*, a thanksgiving prayer.



The church determined that Easter should always fall on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox.



Goddess Ostara flies through the heavens surrounded by cherubs, beams of light, and animals.

EASTER AND ITS CONNECTION TO PASSOVER

Easter is associated with the Jewish festival of Passover through its symbolism and meaning, as well as its position in the calendar. Some early Christians chose to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on the same date as Passover, which reflects Easter having entered Christianity during its earliest Jewish period. Evidence of a more developed Christian festival of Easter emerged around the mid-second century.

In 325 AD, Emperor Constantine convened a meeting of Christian leaders to resolve important disputes at the Council of Nicaea. Since the church believed that the resurrection took place on a Sunday, the Council determined that Easter should always fall on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox. Easter has since remained without a fixed date but proximate to the full moon, which coincided with the start of Passover.

While there are distinct differences between the celebrations of *Pesach* and Easter, both festivals celebrate rebirth – in Christianity through the resurrection of Jesus, and in Jewish traditions through the liberation of the Israelites from slavery.

THE ORIGINS OF EASTER CUSTOMS

The most widely-practiced customs on Easter Sunday relate to the symbol of the rabbit ('Easter bunny') and the egg. As outlined previously, the rabbit was a symbol associated with Eostre, representing the beginning of Springtime. Likewise, the egg has come to represent Spring, fertility, and renewal. In

Germanic mythology, it is said that Ostara healed a wounded bird she found in the woods by changing it into a hare. Still partially a bird, the hare showed its gratitude to the goddess by laying eggs as gifts.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* clearly explains the pagan traditions associated with the egg: "The egg as a symbol of fertility and of renewed life goes back to the ancient Egyptians and Persians, who had also the custom of coloring and eating eggs during their Spring festival." In ancient Egypt, an egg symbolized the sun, while for the Babylonians, the egg represented the hatching of the Venus Ishtar, who fell from heaven to the Euphrates.

'EASTER' WAS NAMED AFTER EOSTRE, AN ANCIENT WORD MEANING 'SPRING'



*Nothing
symbolizes
renewal more
perfectly than the
egg - round, endless,
and full of the
promise of life*

So where did the tradition of an egg-toting Easter Bunny come from? The first reference can be found in a German text dating to 1572 AD: "Do not worry if the Easter Bunny escapes you; should we miss his eggs, we will cook the nest," the text reads. But it wasn't until the tradition made its way to the United States via the arrival of German immigrants, that the custom took on its current form. By the end of the 19th century, shops were selling rabbit-shaped candies, which later became the chocolate bunnies we have today, and children were being told the story of a rabbit that delivers baskets of eggs, chocolate, and other candy on Easter morning. In many Christian traditions, the custom of giving eggs at Easter celebrates new life. Christians remember that Jesus, after dying on the cross, rose from the dead, showing that life could win over death. For Christians, the egg is a symbol of the tomb in which the body of Jesus was placed, while cracking the egg represents Jesus' resurrection. In the Orthodox tradition, eggs are painted red to symbolize the blood Jesus shed on the cross.

Regardless of the very ancient origins of the symbol of the egg, most people agree that nothing symbolizes renewal more perfectly than the egg - round, endless, and full of the promise of life.

While many of the pagan customs associated with the celebration of Spring were at one stage practiced alongside Christian Easter traditions, they eventually came to be absorbed within Christianity as symbols of the resurrection of Jesus.

Whether it is observed as a religious holiday commemorating the resurrection of Jesus, or a time for families in the northern hemisphere to enjoy the coming of Spring and celebrate with egg decorating and Easter bunnies, the celebration of Easter still retains the same spirit of rebirth and renewal as it has for thousands of years. ■



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Roman Roads

The Romans were renowned as great engineers and architects. One of their greatest achievements in this respect was their roads. These roads enabled them to build and maintain their empire, to deploy troops rapidly, and to reduce the need for large and costly garrisons throughout the empire. They also enabled trade and cultural exchange to occur on a vast scale.

The network of Roman roads covered a distance of over 248,500 miles, with more than 74,500 miles being the *viae publicae* (public roads). Spreading across the Romans' vast empire, from Great Britain in the North to Morocco in the south, and from Portugal in the West to Iraq in the East, they allowed people and goods to travel quickly from one part of the empire to another.

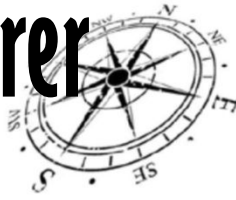
scaliger | Adobe Stock





History Explorer

with Andrew Collins



The Eternal Realms of the Great Pyramid of Egypt

WHAT do you think about when you are about to visit the Great Pyramid, one of the most iconic ancient monuments in the world? The answer, as you traverse the uneven bedrock towards its elevated location, is its extraordinary size. However big you imagined it to be, it is never enough to fully appreciate its enormous size. In the past, its shimmering walls of casing stones, a few of which remain in situ at the base of the Great Pyramid, would have transformed the Great Pyramid into a shining beacon of light.

It is a mathematical fact that the height and geographical footprint of the Great Pyramid make it a scale model of the northern hemisphere by a factor of 1/43,200. Its design incorporates mathematical formula such as pi and phi. Its positional relationship with respect to the other two perfect pyramids on the plateau reflects the astronomical relationship of key stars associated with the ancient Egyptian death journey; these being the belt stars of Orion, the hunter, and the wing stars of Cygnus, the celestial bird. Their positioning conforms to a very basic geometry with dimensions featuring cosmic numbers such as 54, 72, 108, and 432. Egyptologists are aware of all these facts, but choose to ignore them, suggesting they are no more than simple coincidences.

Then there is the function

So, was the Great Pyramid really a tomb?

of the Great Pyramid's internal chambers. The natural acoustics of the King's Chamber, with its walls and ceiling lined with huge granite slabs, seems specifically tuned so that even the slightest sound can make the room resonate in perfect harmony with the human voice. The same can be said of the empty sarcophagus it contains. Even a gentle hum can make its sides vibrate with sound, an effect that might very easily induce a slightly shifted state of consciousness in anyone who lies within its interior.

Tomb is a word that conjures the image of a stone monument in a church or churchyard—a structure wherein had been laid the mortal remains of an individual interred following a suitable funeral service. This, however, misleads us when it comes to trying to understand the true function of the Great Pyramid, for it appears to have been far more than simply a tomb. More apt would be to describe it as an ascension machine; any internee lying within its

sarcophagus is to be seen not so much as a cadaver at rest, but as an ascended spirit piloting a cosmic vehicle of stone across the eternal realms of time and space. Whether or not this was the original function of the Great Pyramid intended by the architect almost does not matter anymore, for when you are lying in that sarcophagus, the sense of transcendence is unlike anything you can experience anywhere else in the world.■



The Grand Gallery
inside the Great
Pyramid (© Andrew
Collins, 2019)

Andrew Collins is a science and history writer, world explorer, and author of over 15 books that change the way we perceive the past. His website is www.andrewcollins.com. From 2020 he will be hosting Ancient Origins Tours to various parts of the globe, including ancient Egypt, where you too can experience the eternal magic of the Great Pyramid.



EAT LIKE A VIKING!

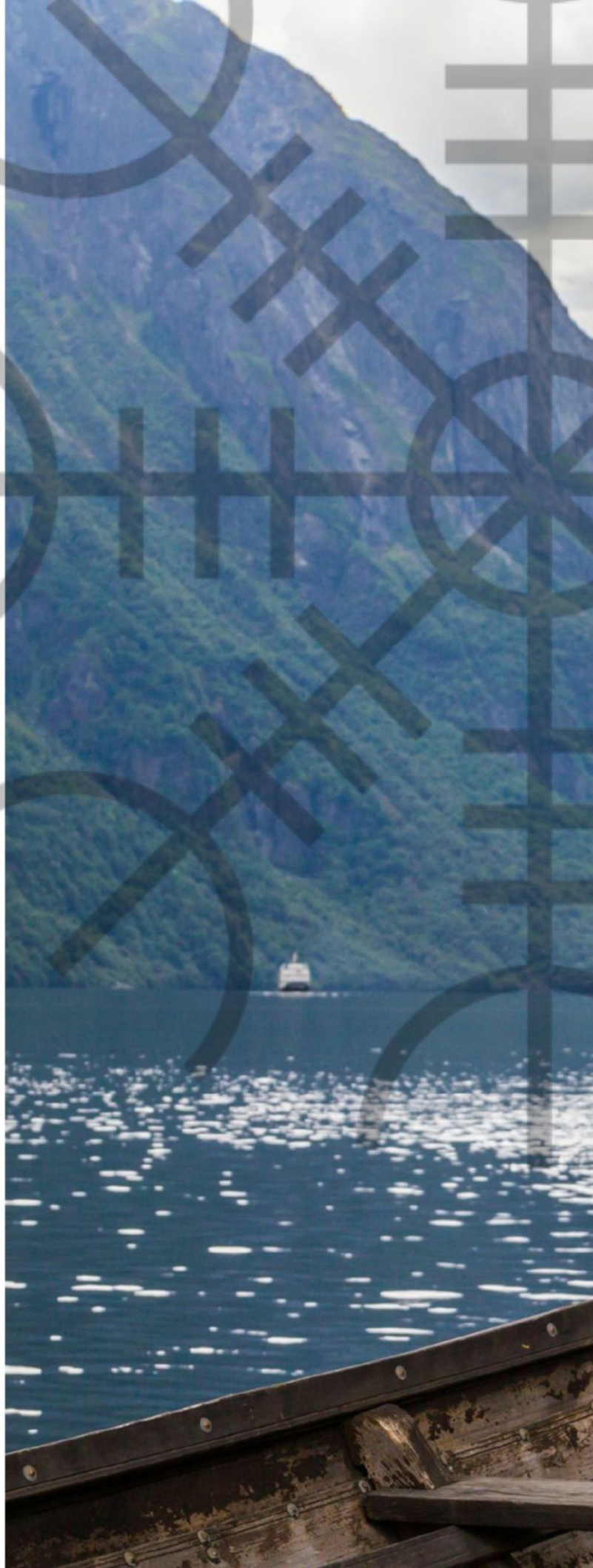
SURPRISINGLY TASTY

GRUEL

WAS A DAILY STAPLE

BY ALICIA MCDERMOTT

GRUEL. Indecipherable gray mush slopped on a plate? Not necessarily! Porridge and gruel made from whole or cracked grains were popular meals for Viking families. Although there was a plain, simple gruel of grains mixed with water, milk, and butter, access to other ingredients could quickly add flavor, texture, and great taste and turn a simple gruel into a hearty, tasty meal. Gruel and porridge came in both sweet and savory varieties and during celebrations, meat, fruits, nuts, honey, and/or spices could all enhance the dish. This was the staple food of the Viking Age.

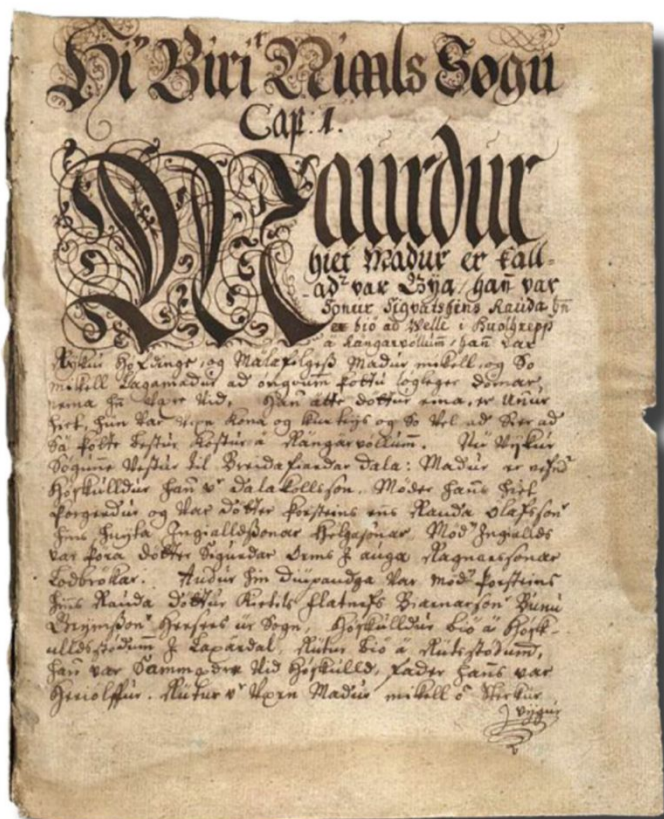




The Vikings generally only ate two meals a day. The first, *dagmál* (day-meal), filled Norse bellies in the morning approximately two hours after the day's work had begun and the second, *náttmál* (night meal) concluded the workday. The times when these meals were eaten depended on the time of year and hours of daylight, but they were generally about 12 hours apart.

Unfortunately, the Vikings didn't write cookbooks and there are no known recipes surviving from the Viking Age. But reconstructing the Viking diet and some of their cooking methods has been possible with the Eddas and Sagas, which sometimes mention food in passing and tell us that women were the ones in charge of cooking. In fact, a character in the *Brennu-Njáls Saga* even asserts "...it is not for men to get mixed up in the preparation of food." When details from the Norse literature are combined with the results of archaeological excavations of middens and pollen analyses from bogs and lake bottoms, the picture of the Viking Age diet becomes much clearer.

Despite the notoriously cold weather of the Nordic lands, the Vikings had access to a variety of foods. What they could not grow or obtain through gathering or animal husbandry, was gained through trade or pillaging. In the Middle Ages, Vikings had many foreign spices included in their pantries.



Njáls saga manuscript page.









For this gruel recipe, we use grain, hazelnuts, apples, honey, and cream. All of these ingredients were available to the Vikings in one way or another, as you'll see.

For example, barley was the most commonly grown grain in Sweden and Denmark. Oats were also common alongside barley in Norway. The Icelanders had some barley and oat cultivation until around 1150 AD too, when the climate became less favorable. Viking Age wheat has also been found in archaeological excavations in Jorvík, Birka, Oseberg, and Dublin. Burnt grains have even survived until archaeologists discovered them a millennium later! While most of the barley probably went toward the production of ale or beer, it was also used for other dishes, such as gruel and bread. Oats were considered animal fodder in some areas, such as Denmark, however, they were used in porridge and bread in other places, such as Sweden and Norway.

A hand mill was necessary to grind the grain for use in gruel or bread. Since it was a laborious task to turn the heavy stone mill, Vikings generally had thralls (slaves) do it. Sometimes lower class women were also enlisted to grind the grain.

Hazelnuts were the only nut found wild in Scandinavia and they were popular. Later on, walnuts, almonds, and chestnuts were imported from other cultures the Vikings contacted. Apples were gathered, and along with berries and plums, they were one of the main fruits available locally. In the Viking Age, fruits were often preserved by drying them out. But by the Middle Ages, Scandinavians began to use honey and sometimes sugar to preserve fruits as well. Honey was cultivated in southern Scandinavia and imported to the other areas where bees couldn't thrive.

Dairy farming was also an important part of life in northern Sweden, Finland, and Norway. Cows were preferred over goats, though both were available. It was only in the Middle Ages when the importance of dairy was usurped by cereals. Nonetheless, milk, butter, cheese, and cream all remained significant parts of the Viking diet.

To begin the process of heating water or milk to make gruel, the liquid would be placed in a suspended animal hide, clay pot, or soapstone pot and heated stones would be placed into the liquid. Then the grains and other ingredients could be cooked as the vessel was turned or the mixture was stirred to prevent burning. I think you'll agree that our method of using a stove top is much easier!■

Recipe on page 88.

VIKING GRUEL

SURPRISE! IT'S TASTY

INGREDIENTS

4-6 Cups Water
1 Cup Cracked Wheat, left to soak in cold water overnight
1 Cup Barley, chopped
1/2 Cup Hazelnuts, chopped or crushed
3-5 Apples, peeled, cored, and chopped into bite-size pieces
1 Teaspoon Salt
1-2 Tablespoons Honey
1/2-1 Cup Cream

METHOD

Soak the cracked wheat in cold water overnight. It will soften. Drain the water when you are ready to cook.

Place the cracked wheat and chopped barley in a medium-sized pot with 4 cups of water. Heat to a rolling boil, then turn down to a simmer. Stir occasionally to prevent sticking or burning. Add more water, 1/4 cup at a time, if your mix becomes thicker than you would like or all the water has been absorbed.

Cook the grains for about 15 minutes, or until they are soft.

When the wheat and barley are cooked, turn off the stove and mix in the chopped apple, hazelnuts, and salt.

Serve the gruel hot with honey drizzled on the grains and cream poured over top.

Note: You can substitute steel cut rolled oats and barley flakes for the cracked wheat and chopped barley but the cooking time will probably be a few minutes less and your gruel will be mushier. Milk can also be substituted for cream, if you prefer.

ENJOY THE FEAST!





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